













# THE GREAT DESIRE



**BOOKS BY**  
**ALEXANDER BLACK**

**The Great Desire**  
**Modern Daughters**  
**Miss Jerry**  
**Richard Gordon**  
**A Capital Courtship**  
**The Girl and the Guardsman**  
**Miss America**  
**The Story of Ohio**  
**Thorney**

# THE GREAT DESIRE

BY  
ALEXANDER BLACK

*"Obey thy cherished secret wish."*

WALT WHITMAN

*"When the desire cometh, it is a tree of life."*

PROVERBS xiii: 12

*"The desire of all nations shall come."*

HAGGAI, ii: 7

*"The difficulty in life is the choice."*

GEORGE MOORE



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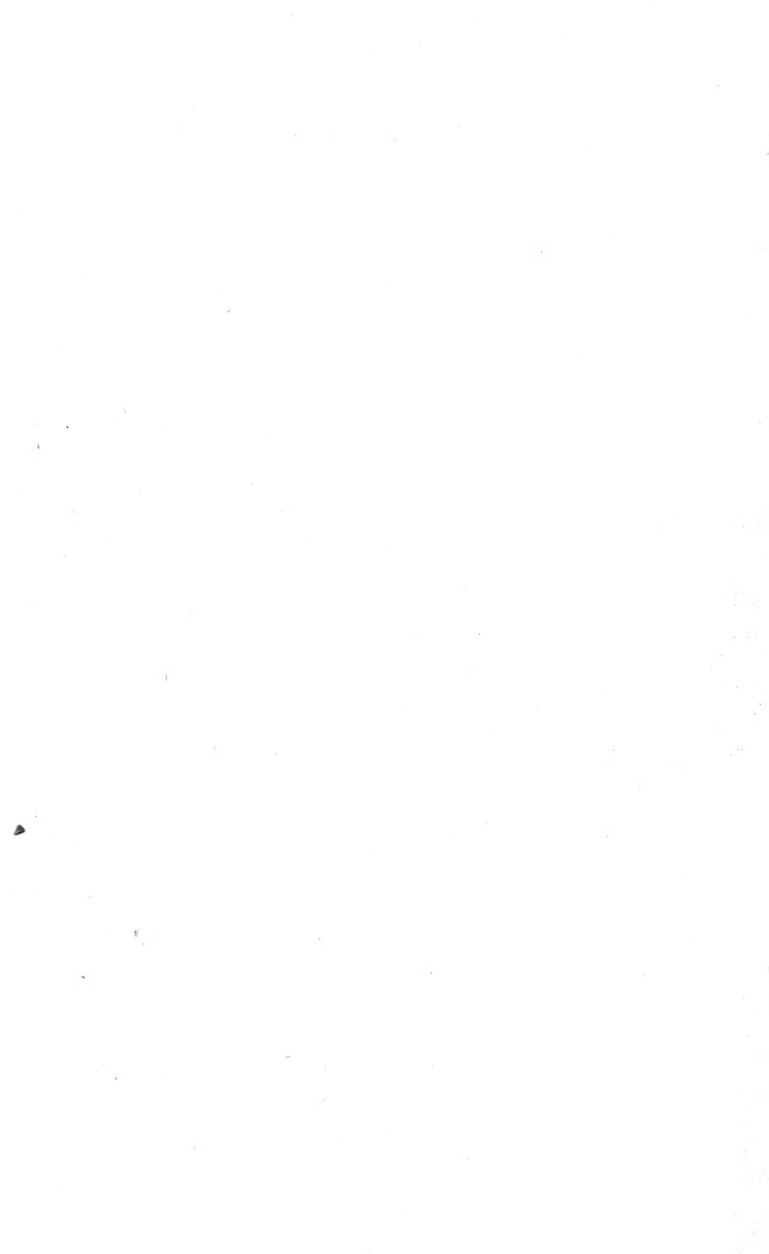
TO  
F. E. O'DELL

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# **THE GREAT DESIRE**



# THE GREAT DESIRE

## PART ONE

### *Babes in the Wood*

#### I

AND so we have come to the City of the Successfully Single; in a state of some excitement, if that is to be a matter of importance in this record, for one may not emerge from silence into vast sound without experiencing a degree of disturbance.

The flippant phrase about the city emanated from my fat aunt, herself not at all flippant, though an impressive image of singleness. There will be no way of keeping this record without her. It would be as impossible not to quote her as not to respect her. Both spiritually and physically she has an amplitude. I realized this afresh as she gathered us in.

There was no mistaking the sincerity of her welcome.

"Well, well, Sarah!"

I also was kissed. Thereafter she stood in the middle of the little parlor, her arms crossed over her great bosom, and cried, gaily:

"Say it, Anson!—say it!—I'm fatter than ever!"

"The more I see of you—" I began. The rest was smothered.

Yes, she was breathlessly pleased to see us. That was plain. And Sarah and I, after the ordeal of the station

and the taxicab and the uproar, felt the high joy of reaching an anchorage. At the moment my aunt suggested a noble anchorage. There is something fascinating in the happy union of a profuse body and a lean, alert, humorous mind; something heart-warming in big gentleness. I am often reminded of this by her wonderfully tender hands. I can remember out of boyhood that she could muss my wiry hair without irritating me, and even could let those magnetic fingers wander across my shoulder without seeming to remind me that I carried a cross. Her hands never whispered, "Hunchback!" . . .

We were, it appeared, just in time for dinner. This had been planned, but the circumstance seemed a graciousness of Providence all the same.

"And I suppose you have a pair of pale country appetites," my aunt observed. "Probably you will want pie, and you won't get it."

Sarah admitted that she was hungry. My sister is readily incited to hunger. When we were much less of age I tried to convince her that the trait wasn't pretty. She insisted that this didn't matter. The trouble was that Loretta Hinch used to peck at food like a canary, with her little finger turned upward. Sarah said this made her sick. Anyway, it heightened a prejudice.

"It has been one of the ambitions of my life," my aunt remarked on the way into the dining-room, "to fatten up one or two scrawny New-Englanders." She always speaks of New-Englanders as if she herself didn't belong to the breed.

I tried to be reassuring, but the truth is that I never in my life felt more indifferent toward food. My emotional center is no three-ring circus. The one big thrill of getting here at last has seemed to-night like all I have room for. I didn't say this to Aunt Paul. I suppose it was part of the country attitude not to say it.



## II

There is a queer little dining-room overlooking a cavern of back yards. It is primly white and blue. A parrot lives between the two windows. It screamed, "Well! well! see who's here!" as we came in.

(My aunt has owned the parrot for ten years, or thereabouts. It was brought from Madagascar by my greatuncle, the restless Patrick Chester Rowning, in tribute to whom my aunt called the beautiful creature Pat. She liked to speak of it as "her dear old boy." Then, at the end of the third year or so, quite casually, without warning, and so far as I know without comment, Pat laid an egg. I am no ornithologist, and I have never happened to ascertain just how eccentric or egregious the intense isolation of this egg really was. But I do know that my aunt was tremendously startled, and wrote a letter about it within the hour. How much she chuckled over the affair I can easily guess. As for the bird, it is to be assumed, I suppose, that it never noticed the modification of its name by which it came to be addressed thereafter as Patti. Yet a creature that could be so casual about anything so momentous as that staggeringly unique symbol would be capable of the most ingenious reservations.)

There is also a cat named Serena. I am certain to dislike Serena. There are cats one challenges peremptorily. Others for cause. Serena is the kind of cat one would naturally dislike at sight, unless committed to all cats.

The dinner was served by a sullen Swedish girl with what I suppose is a remarkable complexion. I wondered how she knew just when to come in until I noticed certain undulations in my aunt, and heard her mutter, "*Where* is that buzzer?" This, it seems, referred to some contrivance under the table.

But let me tell of the significant outcome of this first

table gathering. (It is now close upon midnight, after a whirl of talk.)

Naturally we were challenged to say how father and mother were, and how the Academy was to bear up under my defection; whether father had laid hold upon the Harvard youngster who was to take my place in the school faculty; how Sarah had contrived anything so astonishing as joining this adventure.

"Oh, Aunt Paul!" cried Sarah, "I *had* to get away! The valley had been growing smaller and smaller for a long time. Everything that happened happened over and over again. You have no idea—"

"But I have," said Aunt Paul.

"Isn't it always the women who go crazy in the country? Why, if I had stayed there I should have married some one—any one—"

"Don't be intemperate," chuckled my aunt.

"As I told Anson, in New York I sha'n't have to marry. There's plenty else."

"My dear," observed Aunt Paul, "people marry in New York. I've heard of several cases."

"Perhaps I shouldn't mind marrying," pursued Sarah, "if it weren't the only thing I could do."

"I wish you would eat something," said my aunt. "You don't weigh enough. To my thinking you need about ten pounds. I don't know what you're going to do to New York, but if you expect to shove it about with any effect you'll need a little zip, my dear. This City of the Successfully Single has more unmarried women than any other city in the world—or had that distinction before they began killing off the useful males on the other side—and most of them look to me as if they weren't fed rightly."

"Then *are* they successfully single?" I asked.

But the mind of my spinster aunt had leapt to another outlook. "Probably Frederick thinks I am at least partly responsible for the loss of you. Yet I don't see that I could have said no."

"Of course you couldn't," said Sarah.

"Really, since Mrs. Trover went away I've been a bit lonesome."

"I should think you might have been," I said, studying the parrot.

"As for that, my caustic young friend, Patti and Serena are mighty good company." (A cat *and* a parrot are naturally as well as traditionally ridiculous. How could a sane person deliberately choose to associate them?)

To create a diversion I mentioned the fact that Sarah had scarcely stepped from the train when she fixed her eyes upon a man.

"If that story is going to be told," protested Sarah, "I'll tell it myself."

"Out with it," said Aunt Paul, with a signal to the Swedish person to remove the lamb.

### III

(I like to look at Sarah when she kindles as she did just then—when the rush of something she wants to say or do lifts the haze in those olive-gray eyes of hers, throws a sun color into her cheeks, and makes every line of that glowing head seem a little more so. Of course when the change amounts to a flare-up, and I am the subject, the effect often seems to me rather disquieting, too combative. But at this moment she simply was heightened in an attractive way.)

"Well," she began, "yesterday afternoon I broke loose—ran off by myself—to take a last look at the old valley, and I must say that it looked less stupid than usual."

I urged her not to begin a story with a description of scenery.

"And because it looked less stupid than usual I felt as if I could have given it a parting hug, as you might some

dear old homely person you were glad to get away from, but loved anyway. And so I was taking a straight cut home from over Trent Hill—”

“Aunt Paul,” I interrupted, “a marginal note, if you please. Did you ever see Sarah go over a fence?”

“Keep quiet!” commanded my aunt. “You haven’t been called upon to illustrate the story.”

“And getting down through Peck’s pasture I came to the old mill-yard. I could have gone around by Totten’s bridge, but the Mauraug is very shallow there—”

“I know! I know!” Aunt Paul nodded. “I’ve done that many times!”

(Of course she wasn’t so big then. Nevertheless, it was impossible to exclude a certain image. . . .)

“It wasn’t over a foot deep,” I heard Sarah saying, “and I never had any respect for the Mauraug, anyway. Then, when I was a little more than half-way over—with my hands full—I knew that some one was standing a short distance below on the opposite bank. Be sure that I didn’t waste any time in finishing the journey. By this time I knew that the person was running, and I laughed until I saw that he was fishing with a twig for one of my shoes.”

“One of your shoes?” queried Aunt Paul. “Oh, I see!”

“It was sailing like a boat, and he had a desperate time, for he was trying not to sink it. At last the current carried it against a low branch, and he managed to steer it over and land it. You may guess how I felt when he came back, carrying it as if it were explosive, and put it down on the bank—sole upward, to dry.”

“Very romantic,” murmured Aunt Paul. “The jelly, Hilda.”

“I think I said, ‘Thank you very much,’ in a tone that might have suggested his going. And he did start, but stopped a little way off, looking across the river. ‘I beg your pardon,’ he said. ‘Can you tell me what

happened to the old mill?" He had one of those strong, friendly voices—"

"Aunt Paul!" I shamelessly intruded again. "A psychological moment in the story—the heroine describes the man!"

"I forgot to say that I sat down, and from where I sat he looked very tall. I'm mentioning his looks for a good reason. His looks wouldn't have been important save for what happened afterward."

"Quite as usual," said Aunt Paul.

"In a way his face was just the sort that should go with the voice, strong-looking, and I guess you would say friendly, too. Well, I told him that the mill burned down three years ago. 'And old Hannigan—' he asked then—'does he still live here somewhere?' I told him that old Hannigan died last month. He seemed startled or annoyed, thanked me in a queer voice, and walked away in the direction of the village.

"When I got back to the Academy a certain person who was reading in a corner of the porch remarked that quite likely I didn't know the news, that one had to sit still to get the news, and when I asked, 'What is the news?' a certain person said, 'Biff Hannigan is back.'

"Now you don't know, Aunt Paul—I didn't know until it was explained to me then and there—that Biff Hannigan is the under-weight champion prize-fighter—"

"The light-weight," I corrected.

"—the light-weight champion prize-fighter, the most famous product of Naugaway, if you will believe it, an alumnus of the Academy, and the pride of old Hannigan, who has left him all of his money. I told Anson I had just met him, and naturally he couldn't understand any more than I why he had asked about the old man as he did.

"After all this, you may fancy my feelings when I started down for the mail and found my man standing

on the bridge near the Stebbins place, staring into the water."

Properly, perhaps, I should at this point have checked the flow of the narrative to tell what I knew, but Sarah's impetuosity is so entertaining at times that I had felt inclined, after her disclosure on the evening of our exodus, supplemented by an ejaculation on seeing the figure at the station, to choose a choice moment. Somehow this didn't seem to have come.

"Well," pursued Sarah, "I can't quite explain the way I felt. Of course a prize-fighter seemed interesting enough."

"Naturally," admitted my aunt.

"But it was tremendously irritating that he didn't look the part. And his being a prize-fighter, after all father had done for him, seemed rather an impertinence. Anyway, there he stood with his cap in his hand, saying, 'I've been thinking, since I saw you, that you must be Sarah Grayl.'"

"How thrilling!" I said, quite like a peevish girl-child. So much for irritation.

"The last time I saw you," he went on, "you were a little girl—no, not so very little, either—and, come to think of it, we walked down this very road—do you remember it?—to go for the mail."

"I don't remember it," I said.

"That's because you don't recognize me. I don't blame you. It has been a long time, and I suppose I'm getting old."

"Oh, I know who you are!" I sneered—I suppose it was a sneer—"but do you happen to feel that you have helped to make any one proud to remember you? Wasn't that a nice, righteous outburst?"

"He looked down at the bridge. 'I'm sorry,' he said, very slowly, 'that you feel that way. Probably I shouldn't blame you.' I could see his look harden. 'New England charity—'

“‘If you don’t mind,’ I said, ‘I’ll take the blame for this myself. Good afternoon.’ And I left him standing there on the bridge.

“The story ends, Aunt Paul, in Barker’s store. There were a good many people there waiting for Barker to finish pounding the letters. Barker is always deliberate, but when he is serving the United States of America his deliberation stiffens until he moves like a creature in the grip of some stupefying sort of trance. It was while I was peering at the old man through the boxes that I heard Putney, the tanner, who was sitting on a barrel, say, ‘What are you going to do with all your money, Biff?’ *There* was Hannigan, a boyish chap, with a crumpled ear, a chin, and a positively charming smile, leaning against the cigar-case. Of a sudden I was as numb as Barker, and didn’t quite get what the prize-fighter said about a café with ‘Hannigan’ in electric lights down the front.

“Then Putney was whispering, ‘Sh-sh!’ for Mr. Wade, the minister, had just emerged from the back of the store. He turned on Hannigan and looked him over. ‘I’m sorry for that,’ he said, in his judgment-of-God voice. ‘Your grandfather was an honest man.’ You should have seen the Biff person—as cool as if the minister had spoken about the tobacco crop. ‘Sorry you’re sorry, my friend,’ he sent back. ‘I guess the old man was straight, and I guess I’m as straight as he was. Let it go at that.’ But Mr. Wade held fast. ‘I suppose you may think it no affair of mine, yet it seems a sad thing to me to think of the money of a temperate, frugal, kindly old man turned over, if I must say it, to the service of hell!’

“You may be sure that the audience was a trifle uneasy at this—everybody was uneasy but Hannigan. ‘Oh, say!’ he answered, quietly enough, ‘you’re a bit rough, ain’t you? I don’t see where the hell comes in. I’d have a decent place or I wouldn’t have any. We

don't look at it the same way, ain't that it?" Mr. Wade's face was very white. 'Thank God,' he said, 'that some of us see it differently! I think I have no unkindly feeling for you, but it is a tragic circumstance, all the same, that this unoffending valley should have bred so dangerous a person.'

"I thought the prize-fighter was going to change his manner. But he simply set his lips. 'You're handing out some pretty hard words, Mr. Parson,' was the way he went on. 'Maybe you know your game, all right. I don't say but what you do. If this makes you feel any better, mix it up.' After an instant's hesitation Mr. Wade turned and went away without his letters."

"And the chap at the bridge?" asked my aunt.

Sarah shook her head. She didn't see him again—until that glimpse in the station.

"Why do you suppose he felt guilty?"

I was about to speak, or perhaps I should say that I was debating a form of surprise for Sarah, when my aunt fixed me with her appallingly tranquil gaze.

"Anson," she said, "it's your turn."

It would be impossible adequately to express the effect of one of these sudden actions of my aunt's intuition, or whatever the quality is. There shouldn't be any such quality. It is subversive of the whole theory of reason. There is no way of handling it or of being prepared for it. If law can recognize certain embarrassments as against "public policy," this quality should be reprobated as against social policy. It precipitates conversational anarchy. It upsets the game to have some one jump on a play you haven't made. . . . I remember her putting it this way (in my mother's presence, too): "One of the most irritating things about you, Anson, is that you are always thinking things you don't say." Of course I protested that this might be prudence. "It might be," she said, "if you weren't so horribly transparent." All this because she happens to



have an X-ray eye. The fact is that Aunt Paul apprehends reserve, but she never will condone it, never will forgive anything thought, good or bad, and not said. If you draw your mental check you must cash it.

So that at this crisis I knew precisely what she meant when she commanded, with a peremptory mildness:

"Tell me the rest of it."

Sarah had a look for this. I could feel the effect without turning my head.

"As it happened," I confessed, "I afterward saw—for an instant—passing the house with a plunging stride, the young man who, undoubtedly, had been at the river and the bridge. He is another prodigal son—Robert Hale Rudley."

"Hale Rudley?" My aunt stared.

I amplified the announcement. "Hale Rudley, son of the Honorable Wendell J. There was some story about him."

"Then it is my turn," cried my aunt, glancing past us. "He lives in the next apartment."

"The next—" began Sarah and got no farther.

All three of us gathered up the fact. My aunt made some remark about one flat not knowing how the other flat lives. And so this Hale Rudley is at our elbow. Cities are droll places.

#### IV

To-day we began the great adjustment.

The street is very quiet, especially at night. Seemingly there are no children; only an occasional dog. Sometimes the dog is dragging a woman. When the dog has a man (a chap with the aura of a butler went by this morning) he acts differently. I wonder why? Just as I was going to bed the most unpopular sound in all nature apprised me of the coquetry of cats. But I was too sleepy to care.

The apartment-house is of the older type, in the midst

of brick and brownstone respectability that once had a near-relation intimacy with the fashionableness of Gramercy Park. I get a diagonal glimpse of the old Square, my room being in the front, shut off from the little drawing-room by rolling-doors that have a great deal of temperament. There are signs, in the walls, and in the black-walnut bookcase, of removals in my interest. I am to pervade the place when I get ready, which will be after Sarah has subsided.

Sarah has been a whirlwind. I can hear her hammering now. I suppose there could be two hammers in a house, and that I might find the other one. . . . But I am not ready. A room ought to *grow*.

Probably Sarah would accept this idea, yet she wants everything to grow in a day. The slow processes of evolution annoy her. I tell her that talent may manage moments, but that intervals are the real test of genius. Then she laughs and says something sisterly, like, "How comfortable that must make you feel!" She insists that patience has been overrated. When I remarked one day that something or other had been the law for three hundred years, she answered, crisply, "Then it's time it was changed."

I wonder what will become of her. Naturally she always will be found on her feet, but whither will her feet carry her? Which reminds me that she was out this morning, before breakfast, looking at the Square. . . .

Doubtless I shall accustom myself to the reiterated windows across the way—all with drawn curtains. It is impossible to believe that any one is at home. I hate drawn curtains, at least as a steady eye-diet. Very likely it would be against the domestic law to take mine down. However, I can fling them back.

Close to the window I have my table—a table with a thoroughly settled disposition, and big enough to give me a row of books across the back. The books will have to stay abed until Sarah is through with the hammer.

Three boxes of them. Aunt folded her arms when the expressman lugged them in this morning. But what could I do without my treasures?

The table has a drawer in which I can keep notes, and manuscript of the Book.

The Book! Will it be born in this gully of the town? Is the answer here in the seethe of things? "THE GREAT DESIRE." The title is there on the top of the sheet. It throbs, throbs . . . like Sarah's hammer.

Sarah may be one answer. She is an incarnate Wish. Yet I'm sure she doesn't know what she wants. How much more definitely have I known what I want, there or here, except that I have wanted to make that book, and to make that book an honest Answer?

No wonder the Father man, when I left him in the little valley, looked a question he didn't ask, and that the heart of Woman, peering at me through the eyes that colored mine, should signal its eternal Why! To go forth for to seek—it is in the blood, to be sure, but is not less cruel, maybe, on that account.

I have no doubt we were eloquent in our way. There had to be persuasion, since I could have been checked by a shrug, for a time at least, and Sarah was even more in need of a good wish for her adventure. You might say that there had been a campaign, beginning (on my part) a year or more ago, when the youngsters were flocking back to the Academy and I fancied before me the grind of the school wheels for another winter. I suppose that every teacher has had the feeling, no matter how reverently he may stand before the altar of Education, no matter how proud he may be of his calling.

"Calling!" Isn't there always the larger "call" that must, perhaps, sometimes be denied, but that rings down the wind, nevertheless, stirring the fibers of the soul?

Yes, I am answering a call, a note as insistent as a

star, a splendid, obsessing summons, and I am answering it in the only way I know.

I shall look the world in the eyes and ask of it, *What do you want?*

I shall challenge Life to answer me, *What are your peace terms?* I shall make it tell me what it is fighting for, make it reveal to me the mastering hunger that must somehow explain the paroxysms of history. I shall lay bare the Great Desire. . . .

I shall not ask Life to look at my back and answer me *that*.

Only God, the Final Explainer, ever can solve the riddle of my shadow. Poor old Proff Eckering, with his wistful look from under the brow-bristles, telling me that my hump was "a dissonance" to be merged at last into the "eternal harmony"! I think of this sometimes, Eckering. If you are a hovering spirit maybe you are getting some satisfaction from that fact. Of course it is a small matter. Any one man's chains are a small matter . . . but small things can be poignant, Eckering. Have you found out that on the Other Side?

## V

A note: I see that I have said that all the curtains were drawn in the windows across the way. There is an exception. In a house almost directly opposite there is one frank window. The clear look of it makes one understand the appropriateness of the term "blinds." One should, I suppose, discriminate between a shade, which may drop like an eyelid, and curtains, which are a form of veil. Anyway, this candidly out-looking window is a relief, even a kind of inspiration.

For this window sometimes frames a face. A girl sits there a good deal. Frequently she is knitting—perhaps for the soldiers in France. She is knitting just now. . . .

Quaint is the word, I should say, for the way this girl looks. There is something almost Leonardo-like in the flow of her hair, and this surely is a novelty in a time of fantastic coiffures. Yet there is something entirely modern in the poise of her head, in her way of looking out. . . .

She went riding to-day in a rather trim car. Evidently she is an invalid, or a convalescent, for the elderly woman who sometimes sits near her at the window, and who has a pretty way of putting her face down beside hers from behind the chair, held her arm as they came down the steps. When she turned a laughing face just before entering the car I had an absurd notion that she had seen me watching. . . .

## VI

My aunt has more than a quizzical interest in the adventure upon which Sarah and I have entered. I can feel that without haste or intrusion she yet is set upon satisfying a curiosity not merely as to what we intend to do, but as to why and how we have been impelled.

She herself is so beautifully settled that her study of us, as of everything else, must have strategic advantages. My own case, I fancy, seems to her somewhat simpler than Sarah's. Another book is no great matter in a print-bestrewn world, and a man fanatically absorbed by this form of gestation needn't be so great a problem. Sarah is another matter. Although she is so often a hurrier, she can't be hurried. You may watch her compress herself into a room, and hear her wonder how she shall compress herself into New York, but it would be foolish to attempt to pin her down to any program or to try to elicit any statement of intentions. She always seems so eager to be sure that she shall be free to change her mind, especially to be sure that she can do the thing, whatever it may be, herself, that

pinning her down is precisely what one may not do with her.

One may do a little figuring on the basis of her repudiations. She doesn't want to be a singer or a player, to exhibit at the Academy, to act Ophelia, to study medicine or dazzle the Bar. She doesn't seem to want to send home newspaper clippings showing that she has poured tea. She has a passionate curiosity as to these things—as to all things that spell To-day for her—yet she has an odd sort of sophistication for a village girl. If any one contrives to fool Sarah it will be in a new way.

Nevertheless, she has certain detailed intentions. For example, she is to see Aunt Portia Rowning, who, in our family, expresses the notion of Personage. Aunt Portia is a Dame, and a Daughter, and a tremendous Federation figure. Since the war began she has become all sorts of other things of which I have only a vague impression. She has been to Washington to see the President and a lot of other people. If we get into this war ourselves, she will have a hand in running it, or make somebody very uncomfortable.

I can fancy how Aunt Portia will stare when she finds that Sarah intends to *work*. Of course women are doing all sorts of things nowadays, and Portia Masterson Rowning knows of them all—I mean all of these freak things. But when one's own niece, housed by one's own sister-in-law, betrays her ideas about honest labor, the thing can't help seeming different. The trick might be to prove to Sarah that even manual work in itself is no longer an adventure. I couldn't prove it, except in print. Aunt Portia may hit upon a more conclusive method. Anyway, this will be a momentous meeting.

Then there is a Socialist man whom she is set upon seeing; also, perhaps inevitably, labor-union people, including the I. W. W. chap of whom Chadrick talked to us so fervently. She will wish, I am sure, to find some

one who will tell her all about Wall Street—in a quick way, and some one else who will explain airplanes and how submarines submerge.

I think the oddest name on Sarah's unwritten list of People I Shall Meet is that of a policeman—I've forgotten the name—who did something that appealed to her imagination. I warned her that she had better leave well enough alone, that Mr. Policeman as a "close up" might be disenchanting, and so on, and ended by wishing that I might see him myself—which was disconcerting.

By the way, there is one man with whom Sarah may scarcely hope to escape a meeting. Making every allowance for the boasted aloofness of a city cage—I have heard of one tenant who lived sixteen years in an apartment without meeting his next-floor neighbors, and who mentioned the fact in proud vindication of the system—we are likely to meet Rudley at any moment.

I've been trying to recall the story about him. There was something ugly in the thing. It seems to be summed up somehow in the word "gambler." An obscure word. Isn't it astonishing how a word like that will not only have a color quite different from the color of any other word, but how it will color its wearer? Take the word "foreigner." It quite saturates the figure it labels—and disfigures it also, incidentally. That is one of the reasons why we have wars. When one says "the murderer," one doesn't image a man like other men save for a single act of passion, but sees a *kind* of man structurally and spiritually different from others and smeared with the horrible stains of crime. It is in the same way that we are affected by designations like "striker," or "floorwalker," or "chorus girl"; or carry an artificial attitude under the spell of innocent names like "juror" or "pastor" or "poet." There is no escaping the coloration. I suppose that is what made the word the weapon, why we look out upon life through

bars of words, why we trim and shuffle to escape skulking words, words lying in wait to devour our peace. Men are thrown into frightful convulsions by a hurled syllable. A word can drown a woman . . . push her under.

Would a gambler hate to be called a gambler? Very likely his sensibility would be as to some other word altogether. I suppose every man has his word—his word that hurts.

How Sarah feels about this obvious probability of meeting Rudley I can't guess. I shall anticipate nothing. There can be no wisdom in telling her about the gambler story. The truth is that anything next door is too far away to be considered just now. She wants to see the world. I've told her that I don't know where that is. But she says we shall start foolishly with Broadway, and become more serious as we go on. To-night being the first possible night, she has chosen that. As between two privileges Sarah always would choose the soonest.

## VII

There were many reasons why I should have preferred to go alone into that first scuffle with Broadway. I suppose that in that other case I should have contrived to do it tentatively, to have nibbled at it, to have taken it with an oblique caution, as boys slip into a side seat in a lecture-room. . . .

With Sarah, getting acquainted is a straightforward matter, and this was her affair. She looks a city or a man squarely in the face. Heaven knows I admire this quality, this faculty for unabashed encounter. And no man could walk beside Sarah without pride. All the same, one must play his own cards.

In the beginning she was for clutching my arm through the tangles of traffic. In the end I was dragging her back. She has no sense of caution—not even a primal animal prudence.



She cited some person as saying that one has to be either cautious or dexterous, that one doesn't need to be both. I told her that this was the philosophy of crooks. Nevertheless, it is true that Sarah is dexterous, amazingly so. (I have no doubt that her agility is feminine, and that because women are mentally so nimble, they don't really need to be profound.)

Yet seeing with Sarah even so trite a matter as Broadway had its own picturesqueness, its own excitement. I suppose that is one of the reasons why there is a Broadway—maybe the chief reason.

We walked up from the older streets to the slightly younger, after my aunt's hastened dinner, with a view to one of the "big movies" upon which Sarah had fixed her intentions. It was of no avail to urge that we could see movies anywhere.

"You know," she said, "if we go to an early show we shall have lots of time afterward."

We found the selected place in the center of the greatest turmoil and amid the most epileptic lights—a gorgeous arena for the new art, where for two hours we saw news set to music, science dramatized, and drama staged in sunshine. There was, too, a man who talked about the war while things happened on the screen, and a woman who sang in a spotlight. When we came out another audience was waiting, solidly massed, in the lobby; and Broadway seemed even fuller and noisier and more garish than when we entered.

The difficulty of transit with Sarah rather grew as we moved northward a bit. To lead the way in a tight place is not to be sure that Sarah will like the same channel, and peering about for one's companion is humiliating. To let Sarah lead in a pinched path is a no more cheerful matter. She slips through like a sleek game-dog in the underbrush. One has a task finding her again. Moreover, she has no sense of destination.

She is ready to make anything an occasion for a pause, even for prolonged study.

Thus she startled me by halting before a glittering, chromatic window and announcing, "I should like to go in there."

"It is a bar," I said.

"I know. I'm not going in. But I should like to go."

"Would you mind telling me why?" I asked.

"It looks so interesting."

"Do you mean that it looks wicked?"

"Oh no! It doesn't look at all wicked. It just looks tremendously cheerful and amusing."

"That is art," I said, content to leave the matter there and to move Sarah.

But I was merely advancing into further complications, for Sarah thought it would be a thrilling adventure to have something to eat in a place where there was music. I could see that she was illuminated by the glow of the idea. She plucked at my arm and added an expectant swing to her step.

"This first time will happen only once," she said. "It's a celebration."

I was benumbed by the suggestion. One needs an education in the mechanics of such things. And I could feel, from the first instant, that Sarah would choose the place. I should be swept along. . . .

Probably the noise was the deciding factor. A gust of syncopated sound struck sharply across the area of syncopated lights . . . and Sarah was saying:

"This is Bickley's. Seems to me I have heard of it."

One could not feel the glare of Bickley's nor stagger under the gust of its voice without feeling that it would, inevitably, elicit some attention. By way of being heard of, nothing appeared to have been overlooked.

And so, like babes in the wood, we made our way.

A man who looked like Napoleon and walked like St.

Vitus preferred to put us in the storm center. Everything flashed and quivered. There was an incessant hubbub. A painted girl who began to sing as we came in had to scream raucously to make herself heard—that is, to make herself the most heard—and she had been let loose among the tables.

Meanwhile the waiter, a flabby man, with a face that seemed to have been seared by revolting experiences, after eying me and transparently pitying Sarah, was offering us the bill of fare—a frightful broadside that completed my loss of appetite.

As I might have expected, the effect upon Sarah was quite different. She said she thought she would have lobster. If that broiled waiter hadn't stood there I might have said certain things to Sarah; yelled them, I mean, for the girl with the vermilion lips was in the worst part of her song.

I believe that Sarah had it all thought out. I could see it shining in her face when she leaned forward. "This is a lobster palace, isn't it? Then I want lobster."

There was a kind of logic in it. I couldn't combat the lobster logic with the uproar in my ears and the waiter garroting me with his eyes.

Thus we had lobster, a vast red mound, the ultimate challenge to unnecessary eating. I presume it was all there, antennules, cephalothorax, rostrum—every protopodial fragment. It was staggering.

But it was delicious. I suppose it is that way with the most highly colored vices. The momentary taste dopes the conscience.

I was aware of the waiter's annoyance that I hadn't ordered drink. No one else in sight had overlooked this feature of the formula.

Just behind Sarah, from over the shoulders of a bald man with a crimson neck, a girl stared at me curiously and frankly. There was nothing furtive about the place. Every creature there stared quite candidly at

every other creature. Sarah readily adjusted herself to this privilege. Plainly it was the women who excited her interest. There were some astonishing clothes, an amazing reiteration of bare shoulders. Particularly there were astonishing hats, hats not only fantastic in themselves, but fantastic in their relation to the heads that carried them. (Oliver Wendell Holmes called the hat "the vulnerable point of the artificial integument." Evidently women have an instinct for being certain of pictorial strength in the hat. Like the male Mexicans, they are almost willing to regard the rest as negligible.)

Anyway, Sarah and I stared and ate lobster. I confess to eating in a stupor induced by the fearful suddenness of the whole incident, by the blare of the sound, by the feverish glitter, by a sense of the encroaching nakedness of life.

The whole scene spelled sensation, the truckling to sense appetites. Color swam in an atmosphere that reeked with food odors, smoke, and perfumes. A particularly strident sister of musk advertised a woman somewhere behind me. I saw Sarah's eyes widen at the spectacle of a girl, a mere child, you would say, lighting a cigarette. I suspect that it was the first time Sarah had seen such a thing. Her fork paused for some moments, and I saw her glance travel to the man with the girl as he fumbled in the champagne-bucket. I wondered if she noticed that his hand trembled as if he were in the advanced stage of some nervous malady.

All this time I was keenly conscious of an impending embarrassment which I couldn't put out of my mind. The tip problem hovered like a specter. The waiter oppressed me. He looked like a sick bandit, with a habit of disappointment, who had a deep, truculent distaste for all humanity.

Hazen, without giving me any concrete working rule, once outlined the waiter formula, after the event, and consequently after the determining action. "What we

shall call the very lowest grade of tip," said Hazen (in his oracular way), "the waiter does not touch at all until you have risen. He is supposed to be utterly stunned, to be speechless with horror. A little larger tip he will pick up with a contemptuous gesture in a silence you are invited to remember to your dying day. Yet a bit larger—we may call this the third grade—still merits silence, but justifies the omission of the contemptuous gesture. He merely picks it up, perhaps (it is a matter of personal temperament) with an effect of unutterable sadness, of being crushed under fresh evidence of the world's ineradicable ungratefulness. The fourth grade, in which you outrage yourself and every principle of economic integrity, but in which you rise, measurably, above the horizon of his hopes, entitles you to a semi-audible grunt, which, when you have worked for it, may have for you a quality almost of music. And so on to where you have, by a splendid stroke, completely gratified his pirate greed and won a loud, unequivocal 'Thank you, sir!' with genuflections of abject and artistically insulting servility."

If it were true that the responsive conduct of waiters is standardized, I could hope to find out the true measure of any given sum, but I weakly longed to postpone the measurement. At least I didn't feel like beginning my investigation at the foot of the barometric scale. I left a dollar on the tray after gathering up my change, and in a daze of excitement struggled to hold my mind to an observation of the actual results. I saw his paw move forward. At the same instant there was a startling crash that blurred any effort to follow the waiter's movements and engulfed any possible sound that might have come from him. A woman, suddenly rising, had toppled a tray carried by one of the scurrying brigands, who stood scowling and red on the spot where he lost his burden and his dignity.

So that I learned nothing about my tip, excepting,

perhaps, that it didn't belong to Hazen's very lowest grade. Probably we all will end by paying the waiter and tipping the restaurant.

Sarah's first remark on reaching the street was very simple.

"Wasn't it *interesting!*"

She had, you see, remained completely detached, with no sense of participation or sanction. The whole thing was objective to her. It may be that here is one secret of the power of a girl like Sarah. Of course there is a fallacy behind it. We do participate in all that we see, at least in all that we choose to see. Yet refusing contagion belongs to power. We can't deny that, either. I admitted that the incident had its interest, even if it was rather disturbing.

"Oh, I could see that you were shocked!" cried Sarah.

"As for that," I said, "I dare say these things are meant to be shocking. These people are looking for shocks. When certain shocks pall they invent something else. Eyes, ears, stomachs all have to be shocked somehow. Very hot or very cold, too big or too little, the insistent voice or the insistent odor, the paradox in clothes—all gnawing for notice, all challenging surprise. We are no better than the rest. We were looking for a new sensation."

"Thank you, Mr. Philosopher, for sharing the sin."

Sarah never lets me get away with anything, especially with a complacency.

At the moment she was giving herself to study of the street and its kaleidoscopic crowd, herself flickering through it like a freshly opened flower, all eyes and lips, eager to like, quickly responsive to everything she understood, without anxieties as to anything that might be sinister—really not touched by effects of that sort at all, except that she saw and rejected, as one might a page in a language one didn't understand—and all the

time, I am sure, wondering at the complexity and sameness that belong to every crowd.

"But I know you did like the lobster."

This she tossed over to me as of something unfinished.

I did like it, though I should have liked it better—liked it *comfortably*—but for a nasty thought about hungry millions in Europe, and a worse twinge of disgust at the abominable hypocrisy of that kind of sympathy. And but for the waiter, and the man who made the wooden noises in the orchestra, and a certain repulsive blonde with three chins who had a Pom dog in the hollow of a muff in her lap . . .

I began to say this, but Sarah was now far away from the lobster.

The thought of fat women somehow survived the rebuff. There are so many of them on Broadway, particularly on wheels . . . lolling, and getting fatter. One has the feeling that but for fat women one wouldn't have to wait so long at crossings for noisy and smelly machinery to get out of the way.

There was a lot of this waiting to be done during the whole of our expedition. It was as much a wait as a walk, and it is impossible not to marvel at the good-natured patience with which the submerged nine-tenths of the population bears the pressure of the machine-carried tenth. This is what one thinks on his feet. In an automobile one instantly forgets that the effective displacement of the one machine used to carry him around is equivalent to that of twenty walkers. This is fortunate, of course. Otherwise Progress would stop in its tracks. . . . Some day I shall buy a very soft-cushioned car.

In the side-streets, orators, standing on boxes and holding their audiences with anything you may choose to imagine—suffrage, enlisting in Europe's work, Socialism, money theories, municipal reform. One woman, with a shrill, plaintive, wonderfully penetrating voice,

was talking about Isaiah. This much I caught in the moment of our eddying near the corner, and with it a sense of a vibrant and passionate earnestness.

Each audience seemed like every other in being absolutely passive. These figures of the night might just as well have been so many stage properties placed in appropriate groups. They drifted out of some stream and listened, or they turned away, sometimes suddenly as if they had just bethought themselves of an obligation. But while they stood they gave no sign. . . . Yes, there was sometimes a rumble of light laughter. Yet no disposition, as one might say, to give any help or answer. Each preacher was left to seem as if preaching for his own soul's satisfaction, to get the thing said, to fling, hoarsely or in a kind of broken desperateness of conviction, the foam of his message on the shore of these faces.

More crossings. More paired people, and swishing clothes, and laughter, and odd figures hurrying or shambling alone. . . .

There was one creature whom we both saw at the same moment. I caught Sarah's little interrogating turn of the head. The girl was immensely saddening. Superficially I suppose she actually was beautiful, but to be attracted by her a man would need to be very young, very old, or very drunk. . . .

Sarah touched my arm.

"Shall you explain *her* in the book?"

"Useless to try," I said. "They've been explaining her for ten thousand years. She's older than money. She's the Second Cause elaborated."

"I see," said Sarah. "You've already written it."

It was just here that we were halted by an unexplained congestion, originating in a side-street.

"Something is happening!" cried Sarah.

We were swept for a distance into the dimmer cavern by a rush of curious men and women. I could hear the



thud of blows, as of a sledge. It turned out to be an ax. I could see it swinging at a doorway. Then a murmur went up.

"It's a raid!"

"Come!" I called to Sarah, and grasped her insistently.

"No, no!" she rebelled. "I want to see. Surely you . . ."

Yes, I knew what she was thinking. I had come to see men in the mass. I ought not to shrink. . . . It was hardly debatable by this time. We were under pressure. I could see nothing. So much for being four feet three. A woman's elbow drove into my neck. A mob is merely a matter of arithmetic. Multiply the thoughtless and you have the brutal.

The ax had stopped. I was able to understand that police had stumbled past the demolished barriers. The crowd was expectantly eager, as at a play. There were remarks, as if from those who knew, ascribing a patrol-wagon. There would be prisoners. Women or men? Or both? Opinions differed.

"Do they take them all?" asked a woman.

"Sure," was the answer.

One of the authoritative voices said: "No. Only the gang that runs it. They know who they want. O'Hara'll get 'em."

There was a strained pause, in which the crowd grew. At a certain murmur I knew that the prisoners were coming out. Also, as it transpired, they that were not prisoners. The crowd shifted as if to make way for the loosed. They came by, some of them hurriedly, others shrinking into the interstices of the gathering. Two silk-hatted men in conspicuous overcoats were quite evidently looking for a chauffeur and a car that should have been waiting.

And then came Rudley, sauntering, with a cigarette, his face up . . . smiling, I thought, though not pleasantly.

He all but touched Sarah as he moved past. Her face, when she saw who it was, actually had a frightened look.

## VIII

My aunt has a happy way of accepting vicarious expressions of life, an effect of being content, not only to escape the contact—she isn't at all smug about it—but to find the translation interesting in itself. She lights up to a narrative; she takes the thing that comes, and is under no wear and tear by reason of anything she doesn't get. She has one of those accepting and appreciative *table d'hôte* minds that enjoy freedom from the obligation to pursue or select, that are in no hurry to reach something they won't like, and that have, consequently, a lot of saved energy with which to wander into the comfortable situation.

No doubt it takes years to produce this effect in its completeness. You may be sure that Pauline Rowning is an attainment. She wasn't always fat and fifty. She has traveled everywhere, even if at this moment she doesn't suggest transit. She is as likely to have a good story about Bombay as about Bass Rocks. I can remember her telling about some place where there was a revolution and people were firing with rifles both up and down a street. It seems that she flattened into a doorway, standing rigid for half an hour. One needed youth and a different figure for that. And there was another time on a ship that had bumped something near Alexandria, and was supposed to be sinking. She picked up a Malay brute and threw him down a flight of steps. It must have been a beautiful sight.

Thus when Sarah and I (at breakfast) unrolled our panorama Aunt Paul was a good audience. The wrinkle hovering near her alert brown eyes was on the job. Sarah, though full of the subject, seemed to contrive, for reasons of her own, to make me the narrator.

In the cool of the morning this was not inspiring. I hate to expound an inevitable narrative. The experience came back vividly enough, yet it all seemed rather juvenile. . . . All but the affair of the raid. This had the measure of a real happening. I still smarted from the crowd. Above all, the picture of Rudley had burned its way in. . . .

Sarah told me in the walk home that she had heard the words "gambling-house." They meant nothing to her in themselves. Rudley gave them an interest. I admitted having heard Rudley spoken of as a gambler. I knew nothing more, save that something related to gambling, whatever it might be, had made a scandal; that he was supposed to be smashed. Inevitably Sarah wanted to know: What sort of gambling? What did they do in a gambling-house? Did I mean that gambling was Rudley's business? And a lot more. I couldn't be very informative. It was interesting to look into my own mind for its indistinct images, images of gamblers as I fancied them, and of "hells" where men gambled. I found that there was a notion (as to the places) of machinery, dark, sinister machinery, and very bright, alluring machinery also, presided over by greedy-looking men—men to be suspected of carrying weapons under their broadcloth. There was absolutely nothing I could explain to Sarah. The raid was no illumination, save of public joy in a disaster. . . . Yes, it flung a light on Rudley, a sickish light, in which he looked stained, outlawed. And yet, with his face turned up in that way, the jaw of him set, and the lips smiling . . .

"If I were you," said my aunt, tranquilly, "I shouldn't let the sins of this town become too absorbing. The fact that this Rudley fellow lives so near needn't put him on your conscience."

She had listened closely to the tale, with a little grimace at my picture of the crowd, as if sensing my known horror of entanglements like that, and maybe,

despite her absolute lack of solicitude about Sarah in any situation, with some resentment of the actual contact in her case also.

She brushed the affair aside.

"And so you have had your bit of a plunge into night life, just like two real nice natural children. It's off your minds."

I had only to glance at Sarah to see that she had not shed the effects of the night before; that the crisis of the little adventure was by no means off her mind. My own mind remained full of it, and of Rudley, mostly, I suppose, because of his being next door. The city-bred, I have no doubt, become accustomed to that sort of thing—to indifference about next door. It must become necessary. . . . There are so many next doors. One doubtless learns to stop surmising.

Almost any sort of person or any sort of situation one could think of might be next door, or up-stairs or down-stairs. No wonder so many idealists object to cities. They must feel that the individual isn't watched enough. Yes, it makes tremendously for personal liberty. I can see that. A man can be his own man. He can pick and choose as to companions, as to everything. He doesn't have to come to terms with one parson, one store-keeper, one neighbor. He doesn't stand out so clearly, physically or spiritually, as in the country. Maybe on that account he isn't hated or loved so definitely as he would be in the country. Isn't there a good chance that individuality would go to seed here? And is it the enforced terms of the country that breed so large a percentage of the most successful politicians? . . .

I don't know what Sarah thought during the day, while we both were off on errands of our own, but there was an eloquent incident in the evening while we sat with Aunt Paul in the living-room after dinner, all three of us reading and silent. There came a low, humming sound through the wall, a sound I can't describe, because

it was so low in volume as to be almost as much a feeling as a sound. Yet it contrived to penetrate the wall, as the deepest tones of the piano may.

Without looking up from her page Sarah asked, with an absolutely startling simplicity, "Do they use machinery in gambling?"

My aunt laughed, then paused for a second or two before answering.

"Yes," she said, "of course. Principally there is the roulette-wheel." She laughed again. "But I assure you you are not hearing that. It isn't a noisy thing."

Nevertheless, we all listened intently once more. The sound suddenly ceased.

"I once saw a roulette-wheel," I said, "where there shouldn't have been one to see. If it could have been heard through a wall it wouldn't have been there."

"Did you gamble?" asked Sarah, quite colorlessly.

I said that I had contented myself with the transgression of looking on.

"As for that," remarked Aunt Paul, "I watched for a whole afternoon at Monte Carlo and again in Shanghai. And lost a good sovereign in both places."

"To see the folly of it for yourself," I suggested.

"To get the thrill."

Aunt Paul, her chin on her plump hand, acquired a reminiscent look. "It makes a big difference where you do a thing, doesn't it?"

I ventured to suggest, in all respect, that I often felt like saying that to the parrot. In the jungles of Madagascar, where it belonged, such a scream . . .

"Your nerves will steady down after a while," said my aunt, "and you will think better and write better. Both of you are still jumpy . . . hearing roulette-wheels through the wall. This is what comes of lobster and night-owling."

Yet I had an odd feeling of certainty that when Aunt Paul sought her maiden couch it was with a greater

degree of participation in our curiosity than she ever would have admitted.

## IX

The girl across the street sat very long to-day with her knitting in her lap. The sunlight fell on her window. Sometimes, when she sat forward, peering into the street (she hasn't my range of the park), the sunlight leaped into her hair, giving it the luster of bright bronze.

I guess her eyes are blue; a deep blue, however, something between the sapphire and the bloodstone. According to Professor Trayvor, she should wear a fire opal.

She has a puzzling kind of radiance. She laughs radiantly—I feel the infection even at this distance—showing a glint of teeth that have a young whiteness. She is very young . . . not so young as Juliette was; maybe not so young as Joan. It looks sentimental to write it, but she doesn't suggest years at all. She should have a flowing name, like Felicia—a velvet name rather than a milky one. I hope it isn't a foolish name, the kind they stick on a red eight-pound infant, and that has just that sound when the victim reaches forty and is elected to something.

I wonder if Aunt Paul knows any of her neighbors.

## X

Sarah has been mysteriously busy; I have found many paths, and we have both, in company, made the profoundly significant plunge of a call on Aunt Portia Rowning.

No more selfish tranquillity! No more sordid individuality! No more living, thinking, giving, or acquiring for oneself alone! We have lived lives of shameless detachment. We have been sunken in the sin of sloth, socially speaking. We have been of the craven lot of men and women who have forgotten Man and Woman.

We don't "belong" enough. We aren't in touch. This was all very well, perhaps, while we lived in a hole in the ground. Now it is different—momentously different. There is so much to be done. In the matter of the war, for example. Suppose we get dragged in? Who is to take the lead in all the things that will have to be done? You can't expect anything from the herd. . . . And so on.

I never felt so inferior, so trivial, so steeped in the wickedness of withdrawal.

Sarah listened in a portentous silence. . . .

My Rowning aunt lives in a sternly elegant house on Park Avenue, with a lot of heavy furniture, dark, high vistas, imposing mirrors, and an expensive-looking butler—a serene man with a habit of seesawing his eyebrows.

It is an impressive thing to watch my aunt Portia come into a room, particularly if it is a large room and has many people in it. She has become particularly formidable since becoming a trifle breathless. Her breathlessness seems always to accuse the atmosphere, or at least to convict the ventilation. She doesn't merely pervade, she dominates an apartment. She has a large manner, with which there must be a consciousness if not an expectation that people will ask who she is. When she releases the eye-glasses from the catch on the left side of her wide bosom with an imperious hand (a very handsome hand), and adjusts the lenses on a nose like that of the Empress Augusta, the effect would impel attention anywhere.

That had seemed to be a stroke of sheer genius by which she chose to lean toward the anti-suffragists, even if the thing did amuse my uncle George Rowning. My uncle George, who is fully four inches short of her height, sturdy, opulent, quizzical (like my mother), often seems to regard Mrs. Rowning as particularly amusing. There is genuine liking in his way of looking at her. It appears that she knows just when to ask

him to go with her anywhere—the supreme test of conjugal tact. Certainly he never has the appearance of being dragged in, nor, like so many modern husbands, of following the masterful female with the meekness of the lesser male.

Mrs. Rowning is the sort of woman of whom all the newspapers have portraits on file. She is always doing something that can be written up, and she can be depended upon to have duplicate typewritten copies of everything she is going to say. Her political success is largely due to her stout defense of the homely traditions. When Mrs. Perridge threw her famous “Conjugal Dissent” bomb into the Artemis Club, she calmly snuffed out the fuse, as it were, and crushed the offender off-hand with a blighting speech. Rowning laughed softly when he read the thing in the paper on his way downtown. She had wrought tears on the subject of children, though she herself never has fortified the race against the hazard of extinction. Really, you couldn’t fancy my aunt with a baby. It would be like having her parade with a patented teddy-bear.

I could see by the way she looked at Sarah—it was a gracious, intent, then admiring look—that she was speculating as to what could be done with her. She had a hearty enough way of looking down at me. But I seemed to be deferred as a more intricate problem, as very likely of doubtful usefulness. I was, however, fully included in the denunciation of all these rabid, monstrous radicalisms that are making so much trouble, and that sooner or later get hold of drifting people; not only Socialistic drivel such as you hear down in Greenwich Village, but what amounts to downright anarchy, the horrid *Mother Earth* sort of stuff that used to be whispered in nasty red-wine places and that now (maybe it is the war) is to be heard and perused where it is absolutely inconceivable that it should have found its way. What are needed, and needed tremendously,



are counteracting influences, the great stabilities, sanely organized things—not cheap Uplift, or anything like that—safeguarding the eternal decencies upon which the whole fabric of Society rests.

It was made utterly clear that Aunt Portia is an aggressive social stand-patter—that she is Social Order standardized and personified.

Fortunately Sarah and I were not closely interrogated. In fact, she had only begun inquiries about home and family matters when she glanced (for the third time) at her wrist watch. Her day is superbly subdivided. She gives no sign of haste. She has the unequivocal deliberation of a minute hand. I'm sure her pulse ticks.

It may be that she had heard the mutter of her car, ordered, I have no doubt, for that stroke of the morning. It was standing outside.

"You will go with me!" she said, with a brilliant cordiality. "It will give you an idea." And she arose with a rustling breathlessness.

As she had forgotten to tell us where we were going, it was impossible to guess what order of idea might be in waiting. The novelty of the event made this seem unimportant. A vivid effect of luxury was furnished by the car itself. It was as softly conclusive as one of my aunt's systems. We glided swiftly and commandingly through many streets. Blind-looking palaces, hesitating pedestrians, buses, perky little cars and big, arrogant cars, traffic policemen, "exclusive" shops, and occasional horse-driven vehicles were blurred in the panorama of the windows. These elements become unreal, curiously aloof and negligible. The real elements were the three figures in this silken box, the statuesque back of the chauffeur, and the gardenias in the bracket vase. A thing of that sort is like an opiate. It stifles every vital impulse. One can have no conscience in a car like that.

"I'm confident, Anson," said Aunt Portia, obliquely, "that you will find some new and absorbing interests here in New York."

I assured her that I was quite certain of this.

"We are living in such an *important* era!"

Unparalleled in history, I admitted.

"And yet, you know, we must never forget—for an instant—that the fundamental machinery of the world is to be kept in order; that no distractions, not even the appalling distraction of that war over there, can lift the obligation to watch, with the tenderest solicitude. . . . Good morning!"

This was to some one in a passing car, the half-articulate salutation that accompanies a nod.

"... with the most parental feeling of responsibility, every charge that is imposed upon the caretakers of the world. I don't want you to think that I feel like an appointed or anointed guardian, or anything like that. Of course not. Far from it. None of us can do more than a very little. And the work *never* gets finished. That's a dreadful part of it."

Yes, I appreciated that fully.

The trouble is, she pointed out, that there is so much *indifference*. It's so hard to wake people up, or to keep them going. . . . That keeping them going was a *very* important part of the situation. They could be started splendidly sometimes. Take a thing like the Society for the Aid of Wayward Girls. It began with a whoop. Then there you were. Positive inertia. And waywardness increasing like weeds in a garden. Such pitiful cases! *Somebody* must do the work—and find the money, too.

It would be dreadful, I thought, if they didn't find the waywardness; if suddenly, without a decent warning to anybody, waywardness ceased to be. . . . But there was an answer to this.

"Of course," pursued Aunt Portia, with a gloved gest-

ure, "that is only one of a hundred things that demand the same sort of downright hard work and watching. If you don't *watch* them they begin to *slip*. . . ." She made this very vivid. I could see a procession of things, like the panorama beyond the limousine's windows, slipping . . . *slipping* . . . into a frightful mess of unwatched interests, all gasping or sprawling or leering in depraved indifference.

Then the car halted softly, and my aunt led the way into a gray chapel, an intensely established place with a mortuary sobriety in every line and tint, in which there were a dozen women. Presently there were more women . . . and a rector.

I can't write about that meeting. It doesn't matter. I never before attended such a meeting, but I know all about it. Probably I couldn't explain how I know all about it—how I have always known all about it. One gets it in his bones. It is the established obvious. Its most sensational notes have a drone. Nothing *happens*. Every accent of it has the flavor of an immense antiquity. One could imagine identical cadences as occurring at any time since the Cretaceous period. It is an echoing corridor, without a turn, ending in infinity. It is the piercingly sustained dominant note of Social System. It is organized Complacency, exquisitely serious, expertly intrusive, with a limousined finality. There have been many changes in religion, but these changes have done their work. There have been many changes in Society, but the proper system for Society is finished at last. Charity has faltered and experimented, but now it knows the way, thank God! Everything is finished. Morality is finished. We not only know what they *need*, but just how organization, standardization, and efficiency will ultimately accomplish a divine order. Of course there will be disturbers always, but this only emphasizes the need for these things. For instance, here was a woman in Brooklyn or New Jersey or somewhere who

was actually taking off blind babies to care for on her own account, without organization, without considering for a moment the rights and obligations of the state. She claimed—of course she had to claim something—that the state made no provision for blind children before they were eight years old. Evidently this was a mere pretense, a dangerous pretense. People are always trumping up excuses for disorderly activities of one sort or another. Then here was a man (seemingly a perfectly respectable and well-connected man, too) who wanted to take the wickedest sort of boys out of reformatories and “give them a chance” on an unguarded farm where they were certain to terrorize a tranquil countryside and undermine the whole structure of legitimate and laboriously formulated Correction.

The meeting had something to do with tenement reform, or maybe it was simply fire-escapes. There was too much to think of to follow that particular thread. I had the feeling that they would have said the same things in the same way at any gathering of the same people in a like place. I am sure that a lean woman wearing horn-rimmed glasses, with an old-family look, would have discussed hot-water bags, no matter what the subject of the meeting. And my aunt, though I’m sure she spoke to the point, whatever it was, sounded precisely as she did in the car.

I asked myself there, and I asked myself in the free air outdoors, *What do they want?*

There must be some definite impulse behind these benevolent mummeries.

What does Portia Masterson Rowning want?

Is it the same thing the old-family lady wants?

Is there a common desire that explains them all?

Sarah was not likely to have had the identical thought, though for me it had swirled like a great, staring question mark in the drab atmosphere of the chapel.

When my aunt had alighted for an anti-suffrage

luncheon at the Ritz, and the car was carrying us back to what Hazen used to call "the dear old flat," I asked Sarah what she thought of it.

"Well," she said, sitting forward with her hands in her lap, "if I were a man I think it would make me want to rob a bank."

I guessed that she hadn't figured out a feminine equivalent. On the other hand, I told her, the thing made me feel more keenly than ever the danger of going too close to the overt act—made me feel that it was a relentless world.

"And yet," said Sarah, "Aunt Portia is a remarkable woman."

Of the truth of the characterization there isn't a doubt. It is this fact that gives dimension to the mystery behind my unanswered question.

Then Sarah laughed. "I was just wondering," she said, "what Laura Sherrick would think about that meeting."

"Have you seen her?"

Sarah acted as if I had been tricked into an eagerness. It was plain curiosity—a little more, perhaps. I do want to know who Laura Sherrick is—if she really is. Sometimes I have hung over the possibility that Sarah may have invented her.

The answer to my direct question was without gratuitous margins. "No. To-morrow."

Thus our lives reek with the beginnings of things.

## PART TWO

### *Neighbors*

#### I

I HAVE met Rudley.

On Tuesday afternoon, with Aunt Portia Rowning still stirring foolish speculations in my mind, I had gone to hunt up Major Whelan, an old friend of my father, and had been persuaded to go home with him to an early-evening meal that was neither supper nor dinner, as you might say, yet one of those table incidents that somehow stand out distinctly as an event. The major lives with an elderly sister in a weather-worn brick house in the Chelsea region. I wish heartily to see him again; he is full of pungent geniality, very proud of knowing forgotten things about New York. He looks like Dave Warfield, the actor.

I had left the major while the evening was still young, and against his remonstrance, mostly because I discovered by chance that this was his night for a certain club, and, after a brisk walk, had swung into Fourth Avenue, when I was halted at Pietro's news-stand by the splayed extras, and particularly by the flash of the dramatic word "Verdun."

(Pietro comes from Polistina, down in the toe of Italy's boot. His wife is from San Fratello, across the way in Sicily. They have six children. The boy of twelve helps Pietro shine shoes in the tight little booth beside the news-stand. You buy your paper, then climb into one of the three chairs, and regale yourself with the horrors of a world at war while Pietro embellishes your ex-

tremities. When the boy, whose name is Vittorio, does the shining, or perhaps is permitted to care for one foot, he has a way of flapping the bit of polishing-cloth so as to produce a report like the snapping of a whip, and is mutely and solemnly proud of the accomplishment.)

"So, mister," said Pietro, "other big battle."

I read the flaming head-line, taking its tragedy on unhealed wounds.

"But not Trieste yet, Pietro?"

Pietro shook his head, but without solemnity. "They get eem," he said, smilingly, as I passed the coin for my paper.

"Good night, Pietro!"

"I beg your pardon. . . .!"

As I turned away I had run squarely into Rudley. Naturally I knew him at once, but he had less success in fixing me. It was curious to watch him, there at the street corner, in the slanting light from under the hood of the booth, withdrawing the hand that had been extended toward Pietro's wares, and eying me incredulously, searchingly, then with a recognizing flash. (Acutely distinguishing marks are a great help to identification.)

"Grayl!"

"The same," I said. Our fingers met. And I wished myself in bed.

He may have felt my embarrassment, and might easily enough have invested it with any one of a score of meanings. It would depend, of course, upon how clearly he recalled me. His recollection of me, whatever it might be, would give him a basis.

"You'll forgive me, Grayl, for fumbling to get you," he burst out. "I simply couldn't . . . in New York, you know! Not that a man doesn't meet any one in New York. But somehow it has been so long. . . . I guess that's it—my imagination established you there in Naugaway. I meant to see you when I was up there the other day. . . . Where are you stopping?"

"We're next-door neighbors," I said, entirely conscious that the surprisingness of the fact had to come one way or another. We were too close for evasions.

There was no way of avoiding the certainty that we should traverse the distance to the roof that sheltered us both, and that no greater brevity could be given to that meeting. As I look back upon the journey, short as it was, I feel that I must have acted absurdly. Only some recollection that I used to be considered "queer" can explain his seeming acceptance of my halting answers without sign of curiosity or resentment.

"In the same house? . . . On the same floor!" Could you beat that? Picked out of a world and chucked together. Rowning; he had seen the name . . . my mother's sister. He remembered my mother clearly—a remarkable woman. He owed a lot to her. He had hoped to see her the other day. . . .

As we stepped out of the elevator he put his hand on my shoulder, sending an extraordinary tingle through my whole body.

"Grayl, won't you come in for a little while? Neighbors, you know. After all these years . . ."

There was something commanding about him, or, if it was not that, something impelling—at least it had that effect upon me. I suddenly found that I wanted to go. Whether I liked the process or not, the solution of certain questions was needed to clear an intolerable situation. That situation couldn't go on. No, I had to face it somehow. Seemingly my state of mind hadn't precipitated any catastrophe as yet. Perhaps I could blunder through. And then I must admit that I was obsessed by an intense curiosity.

This curiosity in itself gave an odd poignancy to every impression of the place within that door, to the sense of every visible detail in the apartment that reversed the topography of our own. The total of the place, as one got it first, was of its being impromptu, as if it had been



hurriedly, or at least impulsively, strewn with elements and left to itself. For instance, in one corner of the large room, corresponding to my aunt's prim parlor, is a cow-puncher's saddle, a rifle, a coiled lariat, a gun-case, and other litter suggestive of a Western out-of-doors. The crowning paradox, in another corner, is a barrel, imperfectly obscured by a Navajo blanket. In grotesque contrast to these elements are a beautifully carved cabinet—Italian, I should think—a piece of Russian bronze (on a bookcase, and huddled in the overflow), a big, silent grandfather's clock, and half a dozen interesting-looking prints and paintings. One of the pictures stands out—a brown-toned photograph of a woman with amazingly beautiful eyes.

These things I saw rather quickly while Rudley, after invoking light from a spreading table-lamp and drawing forward a ludicrously large chair, prowled for tobacco. When I begged off from the cigars he put the box aside and found a pipe, a short, black, bulldoggish pipe which he fed from a jar on the corner of the table, talking rapidly while he struck a match.

Engulfed in the big chair, I saw him from an angle that exaggerated his height, and the up-shining lamp gave a theatrical modeling to his face, which has an outdoor color, with an experienced strength in it, and something suggestive of an interrupted boyish radiance. The fair hair and the darkish eyes, the mouth with its sensitive changes, the energetic line of the chin, the mobility of his shoulders in any bit of action—the whole make of him struck me as impressively vigorous and fine . . . so that I was more perplexed than ever. Yes, if I could be born again I should like to look like Rudley. Yet I tried to read the *evil* streak. I thought it must be there. I thought I should be able to read the sign of it. If there is anything in physiognomy or phrenology, I suppose it is all there, written as plainly as in a book. (Isn't it droll that while science makes it plain that all of the

traits of an organism—not merely some, but all of the traits—are written indelibly in its form and fiber, there is no mercy for the searcher who uses any but the prescribed ways of doing the searching!)

“Look here, Grayl!” said Rudley, suddenly—so suddenly that I winced apprehensively—“I hate beating about the bush. The other day when I went up to the village I met your sister.”

“I know,” I said.

“There were some things I wanted to do there . . . some people I wanted to see. Then I took the next train down. . . . A man doesn’t do a thing like that without feeling— Well, at first I rather excused myself for digging out. I felt enraged clean through. Then I began to see that I had been somewhat of a fool . . . to let a girl’s fling—”

“You *were* foolish,” I said.

He stood leaning against the table, eying me sharply.

“Why—?”

“It’s all so simple. . . .”

“If I had been able to get the simplicity of it,” he said, sternly, “I shouldn’t be taking this chance of amusing you.”

“Sarah thought you were Hannigan,” I said.

He stared at me with gathered brows. “Hannigan?—Oh, Biff!” And his laugh had any number of meanings. “I see, it was Biff who was being scolded. Poor Biff! Yet he was lucky. It isn’t the first time he has dodged a blow.”

“Of course,” I said, “I have no right to speak for Sarah—”

“I can understand that!” exclaimed Rudley, quite as if he had a feeling that Sarah was immensely capable of speaking for herself. “The trouble is, Grayl . . .”

He sat down, crossing his knees and studying the black pipe.

“Why do you suppose I’m saying this to you? I hate

whining confidences. You'll think that I'm going to tell you the story of my life. Probably you're wondering at this minute how you can decently get away."

He may have thought that he was overstating the case, but I was far from being eager to stay.

"The trouble is that your sister touched the raw. And the touch came just at the moment when it hurt most. It looked so easy—it was the big, impressive fact to me that it began to seem wonderfully easy—to face about and begin again. When something hits you *then*—well, maybe you know what that might be like. Maybe not. I don't know what your life has been. I hope you don't know anything about being *chucked*. A great thing, being *chucked*, for developing a man, too. But never mind that. The point is—the point of the thing I shouldn't be telling you is this—that mistaken thrust of Sarah Grayl finished a certain business, rather harshly—harshly, I mean, as to the way it happened to make me dive out of the old village before I wanted to go, before I had done what I went there to do. It completed the cure."

"Cure!" I thought. And we had seen him chased from a den!

"I just happen to feel like telling you what I mean by that," he went on, in a tone that had the effect of revealing some sort of defiance of himself. "I've gone to hell and back as a gambler— No, I'm not going to pitch the story at you. I say *back*. I mean that. The other night I made my last play. I wanted to know I was through. Sounds pretty cheap, doesn't it? Like the last drink, and all that. You won't understand, but I wanted to *know*. So I played—and lost. It would have made no difference which way it went. I turned my back. It was over. I had made my greatest winning. I knew that the fire had burned out—or that I had smothered it for good and all. To make the thing spectacular, just as I was leaving the room I heard the

axes. It was a raid. Yet I was the happiest man, I suppose, who squeezed through that yapping crowd in the street."

"You didn't look it," I said.

"Never mind how I looked, Grayl," he retorted, without flinching outwardly. "I knew it was over. You wouldn't expect to see me grinning with delight in such a situation? If you were there—and I judge that your remark isn't a jest—you know how a man might feel. I can see that you think he might feel a little like a criminal."

He was thrusting his thumb into his unlighted brier. For all of his control, I knew that his mind was hovering over the fact I had revealed. There was something he wanted to know without asking. There was something I wouldn't tell him. He could figure the chance for himself—the chance that Sarah knew. He would hardly guess that she had been with me.

Then a question began to sizzle in my own mind. In a flash it appeared to me that I sat in the presence of one of the elemental tragedies of life. This man could, if he would, tell me about gambling—about the gambling passion. He knew its naked self. . . . He could tell me what they *wanted*. . . .

But either the recollection of Sarah or something he thought he read in me spoiled my chance and quite changed the whole situation.

Abruptly his speech dove at an invisible objective, one he had deliberately avoided but a little while before.

"Wasn't it that Schopenhauer chap who pointed out so beautifully why calamity to some one else rather lifts us at first—the first instinct, you see, being concerned with the fact that the disaster didn't come to *us*? The secondary instinct depends, naturally, on the individual—and on how decent the victim has been. If he has been pretty decent his tumble gives a great joy to certain minds. Like those Greek fellows, you

know, they may be sick of hearing him called The Just. Smear the upstart!"

"You shouldn't let the thing do this to you," I protested.

"Do what?"

"Make you cynical."

"You mean peevish. The queer thing is that I'm not, most of the time. Mostly, I guess, I've felt sorry for the others—for the crowd that cut me. That may be a worse state of mind than the other." Rudley gave a twisted laugh. "Anyway, you see that I've been what they call 'under a cloud,' and a beastly poor image that is. Better say branded. The cloud evaporates or moves on. The brand sticks."

"Such a branding is an illusion," I persisted.

Rudley walked to the fireplace, then swung about.

"But an illusion can stick, too. Nothing you could do would rub it away. If they punish you more for having been decent before your blunder, they are particularly irritated by your rise afterward. Trying to atone, eh? Trying to sneak back. The poor fool! . . . You don't pretend not to see that, do you?"

"If you want to know what I do see," I replied to this challenge, "it is that when a man begins to talk about 'they' he needs a cold shower."

"Damn you, Grayl!" He towered over me with a flushed look. "Am I such an imbecile as all that? Have I . . .?"

It was a wrenching experience to see him so hurt. Every strong line in him seemed to bend under the stress of something fiercely resentful plunging under his skin.

"I suspect," I said, as evenly as I could, with my throat rather dry, "that you're one of the sanest men I know. But you've been poisoned by an idea. You ought to get it out of your system. Who are 'they'? I tell you, Rudley, 'they' have sent many a good man

into an asylum. I'm no older than you are, but I know that. Maybe I'm a bit savage on that point because I once knew a tremendously clever chap, as clean and strong and level-headed a person as you are likely to meet, who began to say 'they.' I didn't know what it meant then. And it hadn't become a habit with him. . . . Well . . . they locked him up in Bloomingdale finally. It was . . ."

"So!" Rudley's fine lips twisted scornfully. "I'm a 'bug' or something like that! Good God! I didn't know you were an alienist, Grayl. And so young, too—I understand!" He held up his hand. "You think I need a jolt like this. Very thoughtful of you! Very."

He walked over to the tobacco-jar. I watched him fill the pipe bowl with his long, efficient fingers, his eyes fixed, meanwhile, on the lamp, which painted a sharp flame spot under each fringe of lashes.

"Nevertheless," I said, "it seems to me that in a man-size talk—"

"You're perfectly right." He turned to me quietly, at least with an external quiet. "Perfectly right. I won't say that you show much imagination at the moment. But you're logical, as logical as a charity organization."

I experienced the sensation of being very deep in the chair, of being engulfed in it. It rose vastly above my head, and the arms shot out to a fantastic length.

My position, mentally and bodily, was made particularly awkward by the sound of the closing of the outer door of the apartment and a quick step in the short passage behind me. I couldn't see who was coming without actually getting out of the chair.

Rudley seemed to know who was coming, and waited to turn casually when the step sounded in the room. He said no word until presently the new-comer loomed in my range.

"Grayl, this is my friend Mr. Zorn, who shares these

quarters with me. Mr. Grayl hibernates in the next apartment."

A wiry man, with a feverish, receding strip of baldness, ill-paired eyes, and a curt mouth, and wearing a shabby black suit, nodded and stared. As he stood, his back was toward the sliding-doors of the room that corresponded to my own. The doors were parted for a space of perhaps twenty inches. As Rudley began to say something about my father I was conscious that the man's hands went behind him and that the doors were slowly drawn together. And he stood peering at me in a disagreeably appraising way. Since the room beyond was wholly dark, it was impossible to guess why he should have taken this absurd precaution against scrutiny, if, indeed, that was his notion.

I did at last get out of the big chair.

"You mustn't go yet," insisted Rudley.

I faltered some plea of urgency, said good night to the man in black, eliciting another nod, and found my way to the door.

"You are permitted to retreat, Grayl, on one condition."

"The condition is accepted," I said. "We're neighbors."

He smiled in recognition of my understanding. Then his face grew stern again. "I haven't done justice to myself, or to you, either. It's an old trick of mine. Yet maybe you'll believe that this has resulted in some good—a lot of good. Let me pin you down—will you come in and have dinner with us to-morrow night? I want you to know Mark Zorn."

## II

He may have wanted me to know Mark Zorn, but it seemed more likely that he wanted to finish the game we had begun. We had come to grips. Nothing much

had worked out of it but the clearing of a mystery for him and the deepening of a mystery for me. It was the deepening of the mystery for me that performed its part, I suppose, in preventing me from grasping successfully at some means of not meeting Mark Zorn. I could see that the impulse to get away really had entangled me in the new adventure. It was all a part of the embarrassing propinquity. How does one deal with next-door invitations?

Nevertheless, from the moment we came together at this queer dinner I found myself eagerly absorbed in the study of Mark Zorn.

The dining-room by no means repeats the primness of my aunt's. In contrast it seems bare, utilitarian. The largest wall space holds a map of the world, traversed by sprawling red lines and specked with cryptic markings.

Dinner was served by a man answering to the name of Stokes, who evidently was also the cook—a stocky man with a bulging forehead, a stubble of brown mustache, and a look of permanent surprise. It seems to me that he performed his functions with unnecessary violence, particularly his transitions through the swinging door to the kitchen. There was, however, no lack of dexterity and precision anywhere.

Mr. Zorn came to the table in his house coat, which is simply a traveling-“duster,” whose length gives it the appearance of a drab cassock and lends something comic to his lankiness. Under this absurd garment his black legs seem to weave as in a cloud. The turned-back wrists of the coat show old-fashioned round cuffs, too large, and accentuating his bony, eloquent hands.

Ordinarily I don't believe I am acutely conscious of detail in personal appearance, but Zorn's image somehow has driven indelibly deep, very likely because he is so extraordinarily *different*. Another man might have a bald space just as pink, but I'm sure no other has this



flushed area flanked so strangely with utterly black, wiry hair that does not seem to have a strand of gray, though he must be well past fifty. And then his eyes. There is a queer irregularity, as if one eye were blind, or wrong in some way. One eye, indeed, is more prominent and piercing than the other—until he becomes intense, as he may all of a moment. Then they co-ordinate perfectly, blazing with almost a terrifying flame. It is when he withdraws from you, when he turns upon himself, that one orb seems to follow farther than the other, and the disparity is deepened.

I have said that he had a curt mouth. The expression of that feature is not improved by a slight white scar on the left of the upper lip. (Nature has seemed disposed not to leave him trite at any point.) His smile changes him fantastically—has a way of threatening to make you revise your judgment of his looks, quite as if he had been rubbed out and redrawn. His smile is like the rest of him—different; not springing, as it appeared last night, from amusement, from any feeling of humor, so much as from some sense of discovery, some confirmation of a theory, negatively or otherwise. It remained while he seized the thought and turned it about, vanishing when the process was over.

Mr. Zorn did not repeat his sharp look at me when our meeting-time came. In all likelihood Rudley had made me clear to him. However, from the very beginning there was an intentness of scrutiny that was trying enough. Naturally I interpreted this at first as suspicion, or resentment for my intrusion. Whatever it was, it kept him alert for me.

For instance, Rudley had been copiously hostile in talk, and in the course of time remarked: "A bit odd, isn't it? There I was in Naugaway last week, in a little village where you would think a man must see and be seen by everybody, and I didn't see you. Here in the big town we run together."

He stated this commonplace of chance, it seemed to me, with the unction of a gambler.

Before I could check myself I blurted out, "Rolled into the same pocket."

Rudley himself betrayed no sign of detecting anything intentionally significant in the foolish allusion, but Mr. Zorn turned his face to me with a movement of electrical quickness, looking just long enough to ask a mental question and to leave it unanswered. Then he turned to Rudley.

"Why do you call that odd? There was a reason why you didn't see him in the village. There is an equally good reason why you have seen him here. Do two reasons make an oddity?"

"Oh, come, Zorn!" cried Rudley, "in the name of all your Vedic deities don't be quarrelsome."

To this remark Mr. Zorn appeared bent upon making no response at all. Then suddenly he looked up again from his plate.

"This Rudley person, Mr.—eh—Grayl, is a most complicated human document. I venture to mention this because you have been associated with a studious profession. Really, he reeks with contradictions. I mean that he exhibits an abnormal excess of them, for of course all personality is essentially a matter of contradictions. Only an imbecile is without contradictions . . ."

"*Gracias*," said Rudley.

"I could regale you with the most diverting stories about him. Probably you could supplement them. They would illustrate his amazing diversity. If I hadn't found him in time he would have become too intricate for any hopeful study. And it is to study him that I am here. The opportunity was irresistible. I found him, *dextro tempore* . . . and so you have us."

"What Zorn means—" said Rudley, grinning.

"Don't presume to tell the young man what I mean,"

interjected Mr. Zorn. "It is quite evident that he doesn't believe me. That is enough."

I tried to say that I was entirely capable of wishing to do a little studying myself. There was nothing to prevent me from trying both of them.

"Not a bad notion," declared Mr. Zorn. "After all, you know, one man is as good as another for your purpose. All biology is written in each organism—if you can go under the skin. . . . Doctors get their anatomy from nameless cadavers. Any old soul will give you your psychology if you have the power to read."

At this moment I happened to catch a glimpse of Stokes. He was still looking surprised. I wondered what he thought of Mr. Zorn—of all of us, for that matter. But his gaze was bent upon the plates.

"Grayl," said Rudley, "do you remember Steve Walliston?"

"Very well. He is now the Governor of Oklahoma. Or is it Idaho?"

"Do you remember that dramatic day when your father held him head down in the rain-barrel, with the whole school crowd watching?"

"For forcing a boy under in the swimming-pool. That was a frightful half-minute."

"I was just recalling something Steve said. It came to him while his head was under. He didn't think about the offense he had committed (he did some thinking about that afterward), and he didn't think about the spectacular act of punishment of which he was the subject. What he thought of for all of that half-minute (if it was that long) was of a girl he knew in Granset. He said he saw her face as vividly as if she had been shining through that black water. Speaking of your psychology, what do you make of that?"

Walliston was always thinking of girls, I suggested as the best explanation I had. Unless you wanted to take his habit of always doing something no one could

anticipate. It was the same way with his election to the Governorship.

"Wasn't that act of your father rather cruel?" demanded Mr. Zorn.

"Nonsense!" cried Rudley. "That was the one thing to do with Walliston. Absolutely the one thing. Cruel? There isn't a . . . Oh, rot! Why, the boys worshiped the 'old man'—literally worshiped him. He is—"

"That may be," said Mr. Zorn, tenaciously. "But wasn't the act needlessly cruel? And wasn't it hazardous as an example? Suppose he did teach that one boy—suppose he taught all the boys—not to duck comrades in the water. What else did he teach them?"

Well, we all fell into a hot discussion as to sins and punishments—a futile enough discussion, I suppose, but nevertheless an adventure, illuminated by the blazing vehemence as well as by the dramatic silences of Zorn. I recall one exposition that came at the end of the thing.

"There is only one sin," said Zorn. "All other so-called sins are but subdivisions of this one elemental, inclusive, engulfing offense against the universe. To measure any offense ask yourself, How selfish is it? The answer gives you its measure of sinfulness. Every other measuring process is mere juggling—mere word hypnotism. If you are living in selfishness you are living in sin. Of course, this is too simple to be fashionable. It isn't tricky enough, it isn't peremptory enough, it spoils the fun of plastering on labels, of interfering, and of goading, and belittling, and befuddling the crowd. How the bellowing reformers do love their words!—their funny names that have taken the place of blood and bones and quivering fibers of imprisoned brain! How it must make God laugh!"

He turned upon me his savage glance of inquiry.

"Can't you imagine God roaring with laughter?—shouting in thunderous enjoyment of the strutting

pomposity, the comical, useless industry, the cringing conformities of these bewildered maggots spawned on the crust of a certain grain of sand called the Earth?"

"How about a little of this hen?" suggested Rudley, his knife poised and his glance soothingly fixed upon Zorn.

Zorn shook his head and resumed with his fork the pursuit of a fragment of potato.

When Rudley and Zorn had lighted cigars the talk trailed into the front room, where Zorn sat quaintly on the saddle in first attention to demands of his tobacco. His cigar was fat, dark, and blunt, some brand of his own habit. His way of smoking was startling. Sometimes he used the weed as a marker in diagramming his contentions. Then again he would begin sucking the thing, with a fearful ferocity, sending out the smoke in puff after puff until he became all but invisible in the fumes, and when he would again start to speak his sharp voice had the effect of coming from nowhere in particular.

It was while he was hidden in one of these fog-banks that I heard the ting of the apartment bell. In a moment Stokes appeared at the door, singling out Zorn, and pausing as if to appeal for attention.

"The man with the glove, Mr. Zorn."

At this Zorn made a violent assault upon his cigar, looked at it keenly through the obscuration, then shot up out of his chair.

I surmised, when he stalked past me, that he simply had gone to the door, but presently, after the sharp sound of the door closing, I realized that he had gone out.

### III

"There is only one Zorn," said Rudley, obscurely.

"I was just thinking," I said, "that there seemed to be two of him—two or more."

"I know," Rudley nodded. "I know what you mean. He *is* a freak. I don't understand him at all. Norse father and Scotch mother—something like that. Full of explosives. . . . He has gone away now with a man from somewhere over on Second Avenue—a man with a steel hand on which he wears a glove. You heard Stokes call him 'the man with the glove.' This chap has a mother who is subject to some kind of seizure—a strange sort of crazy fit—and no one but Zorn can do anything with her."

I asked whether he was a doctor or a healer.

"No, no!" Rudley laughed. "It's just . . . I don't know what it is. He seems to get mixed up with things like that. Anybody, you know. He has a great chum who is a rabbi. And another who is a priest. He belongs to a garment-workers' union, for reasons of his own. I caught him behind the counter of a bakeshop around there on the avenue one day when there was sickness. And he abuses them all—slashes at them in the most terrific way. I've seen him all but knock down a man who had lost his job by boozing. I had to interfere. He's out there in the street now . . . running probably . . . very likely in that house coat."

Rudley might have read the meaning of my absorbed silence.

"I met him in a gambling-house. . . ."

It was all coming out. The incomprehensible was unfolding itself—turning up new matter for perplexity. "Zorn, too!" was my first thought. But I couldn't make this fit. No, it couldn't be that. It was too fantastic . . . though it might explain. . . . And then the next thing Rudley told me began to seem quite the inevitable explanation.

Rudley was leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, his cigar in his extended hand.

"I never found out how he got in. You would think any sober doorkeeper . . . There was some good trick.

Anyway, there he was . . . glaring . . . fascinated, I thought. Yes, he played—the wheel, and the cards, too—over and over again. He couldn't seem to do anything but win, and nobody else could do anything but watch him. I think they thought there was something diabolical about him. Finally he staked the whole pile—and lost. Then he lighted up—broke out in a happy grin. You might have thought that this was what he had been feverishly fighting for.

"I was standing right beside him when he turned away with that extraordinary smile. He looked at me and I looked back. All he said was, '*I understand.*'"

"What is it you understand?" I asked him.

"He caught me by the arm and drew me away. I don't know why I did it. . . . I just followed along with him, out of the place, out into a nasty drizzle, which he didn't seem to notice. It was hard to keep up with him. And we walked for an hour . . . soaked through at last . . . talking, arguing. His arms shot out. He turned on me at one point and took me by the shoulders . . . shouting at me. I couldn't persuade him that I wasn't a victim—that I wasn't steeped in it, that I wasn't pretty well through *then*. To advance this only made him worse. If I had the *disease* I was to be pitied. But if I only toyed with the thing. . . . Oh, the old man and I had a joyous time, I can tell you.

"We wound up in a little den he had over near Stuyvesant Park. I was looking for new quarters. The upshot of it was—it's quite a long story—we took this apartment together about two months later."

"Did he tell you why he went to the—to that place?" I asked.

"Yes; I forgot that. Though I guessed most of it. It appears that he had run across some one—some troubled family. He knows so much that I suppose it infuriated him to find that he didn't really know anything about gambling. He's the kind of man who

would want to know what it was like—and the kind of a man who would get it in a flash . . . that is, get all he could get without feeling the . . . well, the thing that sends a man back to it.”

“What is that thing?” I asked, with no attempt to conceal my eagerness.

“If I could answer that . . .” Rudley laughed derisively, struck a match, and watched it burn out. “Yes, I’d be *some* psychologist. It would have been interesting to ask my father that question on the day of that affair in the Chicago wheat-pit.”

“You must know what I mean. What did you *want*? Was it the money?”

He turned squarely, but his look went past me. He was trying, honestly, I believe, to see into the heart of the mystery—to see into the heart of himself.

“No,” he said, slowly, “it wasn’t the money. No. Money never stopped the gambling hunger. A man thinks it will. He thinks of some big wad of money . . . some vaguely tremendous bunch of winnings. But if this should happen it would only throw a red light over the game. I’ve tried breaking away with a fat roll. You don’t need to have some one whisper, ‘This seems to be your night.’ That whisper is already in your brain. To double the thousand—it would be the same with a million. Good God! no! It’s never the money! It has something to do with the way you feel when you’re *waiting*. Can you understand that? The way you *feel*—it can be a kind of pain—an agony, a delirious, delicious agony sometimes—when you are *waiting*—when you don’t know—when all the wheels of the universe are spinning around you—and you, little you, *wishing* with the push of a billion volts, are trying to make them obey you. . . . Something like that. I don’t know. You’re in the philosophy line, Grayl. What is it?”

He got up and walked the length of the room and back,



striding strongly. I wondered whether he really had kicked off the ball and chain.

"It seems to me," I said, "altogether a question of what you *want*—what you want *most*. Evidently you've decided that you want something else more than you want the devilish thrill of a game. We've all got to decide some time or other which thing we want most. That thing, whatever it may be, marks a man's destination. Sounds preachy. But you asked me what I thought."

He loomed before me, as if to block escape, and then demanded:

"What do *you* want most?"

Something, Heaven knows what, had brought us very close for a moment, so that each was speaking from the inside. Yet I felt frightfully small as I sat huddled there before him. If there had been anything but sheer humanity in his eyes at that moment, I should have evaded him.

"Most?" I repeated, in a rising heat of feeling, a little dismayed on the defensive. "Well, of all that may be called possible and thinkable, I wish most to get the true answer to a great question—and to write it as it should be written."

"You don't mean the gambling game?"

"I mean the greatest game of all—the game of life."

"Oh! . . . I see."

It was plain that he didn't see, and also that this appeared to him as unnecessary.

"Fame," he said, challengingly.

"No. Not fame. Something real. It might include fame."

"And you're gambling on the chance of winning it," he went on, without moving. "You're staking your life on it."

"That may be," I admitted. "But you've got to grant me this—since you've used that word—I can win

only by benefiting the world. I sha'n't be taking the winnings from any one else."

As I write I can see how grandiloquent this must have sounded. His retort was milder than I deserved.

"I'm not so sure of that. One of the things that make it so hard to win fame, I suppose, is the pressure of other competitors for the same stake. But never mind. That may be what you professors call an academic question. The real fact is, Grayl, that I understand you better than you think I do. I've a little incentive of my own."

"You don't mean," I gasped, "that *you* are looking for fame?"

He laughed genuinely, and the pressure lifted.

"Let me show you something," he said, impulsively, indicating that I should follow him, which I did in a state of the utmost bewilderment.

As we came to the door of that room off the passage I first saw his couch, laid with military precision. It was not until we were within the room that the jumble on the other side became apparent. . . . A machine-shop, it looked like, reduced to the smallest terms. In the focus of its complexity was a small engine, which I rightly estimated as a motor.

Rudley threw off his coat and banished his cigar.

"Know anything about mechanics?" he cried, with something of exultation in his voice.

No one could know less, I told him.

Because I know so little the whole of that bit of drama in his explanation shone grotesquely, had a glamour of that romance which invests invention when you are not too close. Closeness must make a difference. It is like that point of Hazen's. "There is nothing so beautiful," he said, "as an insect—that isn't stinging you."

"An entirely new rotary principle," Rudley told me. There was a lot of detail in his explanation, even if he tried to leave out the technical terms. He had stumbled on it in his work as an engineer. (So he is an en-

gineer.) Of course this was a very small model—just a gill of gas over here. And by plugging in to the house current he could omit certain elements for the present and test the essential principle perfectly.

Suddenly the thing was going . . . humming the tune we had heard through the walls!

"Take this piece of wood," demanded Rudley, "and press it on that driving-shaft. That will give you an idea of the little fellow's punch."

I did as he directed.

He laughed gaily. "Can't stop it, eh? That's *power!* I tell you, boy, it has the kick! If I took off the muffler—which would make me a nuisance in the house—I could show you still more. Now imagine that machine multiplied in size fifty—a hundred—times. Imagine it in the air, with its wings—there isn't a thing in Europe that could touch it."

The motor hummed on, like the dominant note in Rudley's oration.

"Is it crooked to be thinking of the soul of this while working for a corporation without a soul? . . . Down there under Broadway, wading through Italians and muck and splinters of New York's obstinate backbone (with the entrails laced up overhead) . . . isn't that *tough*, when I want to be flying with the big brother of this at my feet, streaming through the sky, giving it a real chance, *proving* it—proving it and revolutionizing the whole motor game?"

I peered at him, with my own breath quickened. He was all aglow—transfigured.

"Of course I wasn't always so sure," he went on. "And even yet, sometimes, perhaps—especially, I might say, just before going to bed—I go back to that incident in my grandfather's life. He was a thoroughly practical man, but he had an obsession—he believed that perpetual motion was attainable. And year after year—like this, in the evening—he worked on a machine. I

once saw pieces of it. I believe it was beautifully made. He was in no hurry, I guess, because he was so sure. Just content to carve, or hammer out, or polish to the greatest conceivable nicety one fragment after another. And all the time, my grandmother told me, his face became more and more *peaceful*—that was her word. He must have been splendidly sure. My father didn't ridicule the thing, but he didn't take much pains to conceal his skepticism, and every step toward certainty was to my grandfather a step toward confronting Wendell with the great fact. I can fancy his grunting, triumphantly, 'I'll show him!'

"Late one night my grandmother looked into the place he had fixed up as a workshop and saw him sitting before the machine in rapt contemplation. The thing was going, steadily, smoothly, silently. My grandmother told me that it seemed like a ghostly thing because she felt that there should be *some* sound, and there wasn't a whisper of friction—not a ghost of a whisper.

"Then my grandmother stood up and began putting away certain tools, even those which she had noticed that he always left out there on the bench.

"'Mother,' he said, very quietly (she told me this many times), 'I've done it. It's finished.' He didn't exclaim, 'What will Wendell say now?' or anything like that. But she knew what he was thinking.

"It doesn't do for a wife to get too much wrapped up in a man's adventures. I always think she did just the right thing—believed in him, you know, but didn't get too greatly entangled in any of his ideas. When he needed her she was always right there with sympathy and encouragement and a comfortable, unassertive responsiveness. So that it was just like her to say, simply, 'I'm glad, Father!'

"They stood there for several minutes while the big wheel of wood and steel, and all the smaller wheels in

their way, went round and round and round—without a whisper.

“Then he lighted a small lamp he always took to his room, leaving her at some little domestic detail she had forgotten, said, ‘Good night, Mother!’ went up half a dozen steps, and came down again to go over and kiss her—that was a great point with her—that kiss. He kissed her good night only once in a long while; so that it stood out, you see. Anyway, she dwelt on that. And he climbed up to bed.

“In the morning when she went in to wake him he was cold. He died believing that he had done it. Of course . . . hours afterward . . . they found that the machine had stopped in the night. But he didn’t know that. . . .”

I was ashamed of the tears that blurred the room for a moment.

“Rudley,” I said, “I’m going away to think over that story.”

He made a gesture as if to urge me to stay, but said only that he was sorry I must go.

At the door I pledged him to visit us.

#### IV

It is a curious fact that the story about the perpetual-motion grandfather hung in the front of my mind while I tried to translate Rudley and Zorn to Sarah and Aunt Paul. Though I didn’t tell the story itself, I have no doubt it colored my recital in certain ways. It had, indeed, impressed me very strongly as setting out a strange, elemental passion, a great desire that seemed to that old man to have been fulfilled, but that was deceived by a kind of derisive fatality. Yet one naturally thought farther than that. One went after the possible corollaries, the possible prophecy. . . . Not only the possible prophecy as to Rudley or any other one creature, but

as to the matter of an inherent irony lurking in all desires.

Sarah listened to my narrative in an attentive silence. It was Aunt Paul who conducted the cross-examination—a function in which she displays superior gifts. It was her question that brought out the fact that I had explained Sarah's blunder—how satisfactorily I was not assured.

When it came to the last stroke, the invitation to the neighborly visit, I found it equally difficult to estimate the impression created.

"If you didn't fix a time," said Aunt Paul, "I doubt if he will come."

"Why shouldn't he come?" I demanded.

"Well," said Aunt Paul, "detached men have a way of keeping out of entanglements. You have to trap them."

I insisted that this sounded like the peep of a disappointed social angler. Why should there be any trap about it? If Rudley didn't wish to call he could go hang.

"I don't think he'll come," said Sarah.

I had been watching Sarah. There have been so few concrete opportunities for getting at her later psychology, and she has been so elusive when I have pounced on an opportunity, that I had excellent reason for any alertness.

What soon became apparent (it was at breakfast again) was that her emotions at this juncture were more concerned with another matter.

She has seen Laura Sherrick.

She has been doing a lot more than that—investigating the Red Cross, getting acquainted at a settlement house, crying at a war matinée, taking tea in a studio, buying a taffeta gown at Buddington's, and so on—but the meeting at last with Laura Sherrick I understood to be the dominating incident of the interval.

My image of Laura Sherrick had been built from fragments of letters and comment contributed, often grudgingly, I thought, by Sarah during a period of several years—beginning sometime toward the end of her college days. I had indeed seen a photograph of her from which I gathered that she wore her hair bobbed off in some way. Yet she didn't look at all like the short-haired type. A flashing face came back to me, but the effect was too misty to be of much service now. There could be no doubt that she was some sort of a radical person. Certainly the quotations had suggested that much at the time I heard them. And Sarah had uniformly seemed to respond to the quality of her, whatever it was.

I remember asking Sarah whether Miss Sherrick was married. Her answer was that of course she wasn't. Just why she of course wasn't did not appear. But so much else didn't appear that I felt no compulsion as to filling in such details. On another occasion I asked what she *did*, whether she was a business woman or a plain parasite of some description. Upon this point Sarah was entirely vague, probably because she didn't know. Yet she ventured the opinion that she was a sort of secretary to somebody—it seemed amazing that Sarah shouldn't have acquired more illuminating information.

The account of this meeting with Miss Sherrick which Sarah unfolded to Aunt Paul and me had the tone and detail appropriate, as I took it, to a domestically public disclosure. I knew that both my aunt and myself individually would get more—if this happened to be convenient.

Miss Sherrick, it seems, lives in an apartment with two other young women, one of them an actress who sleeps all the morning and has her breakfast in bed (there is a colored housekeeper), and the other a department-store buyer—rather a chunky person who swears in a funny way, smokes cigarettes through a gold holder, and whose manner of talking, when she is wound up,

is a perfect scream. (Sarah uses only little of feminine slang or frayed girlish colloquialisms, so that there is in any reckless lapse always the effect of juvenility. I don't mean that she ever could begin a sentence with, "Listen. . . !!" But sorority habits linger, and she can quite fluently confirm the theory that there is a sex color in jargon.)

Sarah had taken dinner with Laura Sherrick at some sort of a basement place where odd-looking people foregather. It was a very good dinner and Laura had been wonderful. For the first time Sarah had begun to understand why Laura, at the end of her second year in college, had impulsively said, "I'm through with this drivel!"—a matter communicated in one of the first letters Sarah had received from her. They talked over their first meeting, which happened at one of those villages that are called "summer places," when Laura displayed such quick and hearty interest in what may well have seemed the quaintness of father's Academy.

Laura asked Sarah pointedly what work she was going to do. She showed no astonishment that Sarah hadn't a fixed idea, yet her assumptions, I have no doubt, were not less influential on that account. Apparently she had searched Sarah's mind. What she found was, of course, no part of Sarah's story.

As for Sarah herself, she had emerged from that dinner with the knowledge that Laura Sherrick was an Individualist, without finding out what an Individualist was. Evidently she believed it was something quite the opposite of the Aunt Portia Rowning sort of person. Anyway, there were a great many things for which Laura Sherrick had no respect at all. Millionaire rows, for instance, and fashionable churches, and padrones, and boards of aldermen, and sweat-shops, and endowment-strangled colleges, and prisons—and war.

They had talked quite a lot about war. And it was wonderful to hear her way of putting it . . . wonderful.



Aunt Paul turned to me. "Is this Socialism, Anson?"

I insisted that an Individualist couldn't be a Socialist. "It sounds," I said, "more like an amateur brand of Anarchism."

Sarah looked startled for a moment. Then she laughed.

"Oh no!" she said. "She knows the greatest Anarchist of them all. Let me see, her name is . . . Anna Jassard. She knows her very well. But I'm sure Laura isn't an Anarchist. She is an Individualist."

Sarah stuck to that. . . . Individualist, without explanation, and without evil, of course.

The thing gave me a most uneasy feeling.

It stirred up the whole question of Sarah. I suppose Sarah is not less a question because she is my sister. She may be very shrewd, not at all rattle-brained, not at all gullible or footless. But she is a girl. She knows so much that all the old safeguards look grotesque. Yet she has experienced so little that the scrap-heap of safeguards begins to inspire a misgiving. It is all very well to take women off their ancient car tracks and make jitneys of them. They may run straight enough. But in heavy traffic the opportunities for wabbling catch one's breath.

This is the American way—to give them lectures and latch-keys, and trust to God.

As for Laura Sherrick, I suppose Sarah decided that she wasn't an Anarchist because it didn't appear that she had a bomb beside the powder-puff in her hand-bag.

And then here was Aunt Paul brushing aside my anxieties.

"One of the things you will discover about New York," she said, "is that most people take it out in talk. You don't want to trust either its angels or its devils. Neither sort is likely to live up to your expectations. Most of them are looking for the Convenient Life. Secretly we're all Individualists, of one sort or

another. Some of us like to raise a talk-row about it. That's where the difference comes in."

"You make it seem very simple," I said.

"Well," pursued Aunt Paul, "if you should happen to decide that it *is* simple it would help keep you from getting thin. I've met a lot of these rabid-talking people—people who object to everything, and they all wanted their meals like the rest of us."

"Laura Sherrick isn't a bit rabid," suggested Sarah. "Not at all. You would like her tremendously. . . . And, really, you would be sure to like Miss Bransol (that's the buyer woman). You see, the actress doesn't get home till very late, of course, and we three were there together until my time for going—"

"Which was . . .?" I interjected, like a crafty parent.

"At ten o'clock, when Laura walked with me to our corner. Miss Bransol is not an Individualist. You would think they might spat over it. But they don't, I fancy. Anyway, Miss Bransol announces, 'Me for the corporations,' and other pleasantries like that, without any signs of an explosion that you could notice."

"The successfully single," murmured Aunt Paul.

"A pretty bunch!" I cried, with what was intended for a despairing accent.

It was two days later that Sarah came into my room with a look in her face that suggested something impending.

Of course at first she said something about the Book. Then she looked at me, with those long lashes of hers lined up close together.

"Do you know, Anson," she said, "you really have a fine head."

"What are you getting at?" I asked.

"And the kind of eyes that women like."

"If you were capable of actual observation," I said, "you would have noticed that I don't care to be interrupted."

"But the most remarkable thing about you is that you are so *innocent*. I often think about it."

"Do you?" I snapped at her. "How absorbingly impressive! Would you mind doing your thinking elsewhere for a little while?"

"I mean it, old man. *Innocent*. Are all philosophers innocent? Laura Sherrick says they're all bachelors—Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Kant, Spencer, Nietzsche—I've forgotten the others."

"I've no doubt," I said, "that your head will be filling up with Laura Sherrick stuff."

"There's something nice about your being innocent. I don't mean that solemn side of you. I don't mean what Waddy meant when he called you 'the holy Grayl.' No. I mean that it's sort of comforting to see that even a man can know a lot and be grown up, and yet—"

"What are you driving at?" I demanded. "I like to hear you talk, even when you talk nonsense, and it is immensely comforting to be a source of amusement to you, but just now I am occupied, as you might have remarked if you had cared to."

"I know, Anson," she said, dropping into a chair. "I'm coming to something. But if I didn't tell you now about your innocence, and how much I like it, how do I know that I shouldn't forget to mention it? You see, there is something catching about your research habits. Besides, some one has got to analyze *you*. You can't do it yourself. And you are a 'document' like the rest of us. How do you know that if I could dissect you, somehow, tremendously important facts about the 'so-called human race' would not be revealed to an astonished world?"

"Keep right on," I said, "until you are quite ready to tell me what this is all about."

"Here you are on the way to the appalling age of twenty-seven. It's funny, but I can't remember when you didn't seem to be old. You were old when you ex-

plained to me the why of a kite. You were old—dreadfully old—when you unfolded the science of a wood-chuck trap. You must, I think, have been at least nine when you outlined so beautifully (I'm not joking) why only one star stayed still while all the others kept on being somewhere else."

"Oh come!" I said. "Quit it."

"Of course you showed your great age when you illustrated the right way of nailing on a shingle. It was too bad you smashed your finger. But you made a good point of that, I remember, after mother had finished with the peroxide and the bandage. Then you know how venerable you were when you made it clear why the bride always stood on the left of the bridegroom at the altar. You weren't quite sure why they threw old shoes after the carriage, but you 'covered' wonderfully on that, too. You were oldest, though, a good deal older than you are now, when you came back after your Freshman year. By that time you were away past the chloride of sodium pleasantries at the table. You had new ones, planned particularly for my benefit. You even had a notion, I believe, of stumping father. And presently you were pointing out the holes in sociology—you had decided, I believe, to let 'trig' and Assyriology and some other things stay pretty much as they were—and you knew queer facts about Pragmatism and the New Psychology. The puzzling thing is that nothing of all that spoiled your innocence at all."

When Sarah goes on like this I know by long experience that she has been reading something or has fallen in with somebody or other, that the ready tinder of her feminine equivalent for a sense of humor has been joyously ignited in expectation of getting a "rise" out of me. She always has regarded me as fair game. She thinks she knows me through and through.

"Which crowd was it this time?" I asked her.

"Crowd . . .?" she fenced.

"You've run into some new herd. You may not be transparent, Sarah, as an organism, but there is something very simple about your expedients."

"You see, you insist on being old," said Sarah, her knees crossed, that round chin of hers resting in her hand. "Of course I've seen people. I'm seeing people all the time. I had luncheon to-day at the Women's City Club, away up in the air where you can see the kingdoms of the earth. But that wasn't what reminded me how innocent you are—though it might have helped. What really reminded me was looking over the men at that Preparedness meeting last night."

"And are you prepared now?" I asked.

"Aunt Portia's friend, Mrs. Kenlow, introduced me to a number of people. They weren't all for preparedness, by any means. There was a lot of stiff talk. Isn't it astonishing what a muddle difference of opinion makes? There was one man there, a queer, excitable little man, who kept saying: 'What you call being prepared, getting the guns ready, is just plain militarism. You can't make anything else out of it. If you get guns ready you will shoot them *off*, sooner or later.' His ears got very red when he said this and he kept on looking as if he were going to cry. The man who captured me was a splendid big fellow with the most adorable smile you can imagine, and the most fascinating kind of business-like earnestness, who made it all so plain and so necessary that I couldn't see how any reasonable person could help feeling that we should take better precautions. I'm for being ready, *hard*. Of course Laura Sherrick looks at it differently, very differently. I wish she had been there. I wish *you* had been there.

"But this," Sarah went on, "isn't the main point of what I came in to see you about."

"You'll zigzag to it by and by," I suggested.

"The thing I really wanted to tell you is that I've asked your Zorn friend to dinner."

"Zorn? . . . to dinner?"

Sarah laughed appreciatively. She thoroughly likes plumping a thing of this sort.

"He was over in a corner. It was the millionth chance, but Mr. Selaway, who was talking to me about labor unions, happened to know him. The moment I heard the name something you said about his looks came back to me. Somehow I knew in a flash that he was the man next door."

"And you promptly asked him to dinner?"

"No, foolish! I promptly asked him what he thought about the question of the meeting. 'The question is exactly as wide as the Atlantic,' he said. That's all I could get out of him on that. I had the feeling that he was rather contemptuous of me as a mere female. He changed a little when I identified myself for him. In fact, he looked at me again, which it seemed at first he might never happen to do. 'Grayl's sister? Well, well!'—and so on. Then we really began to talk. I believe he actually likes me."

"And so you asked him to dinner?"

"You must have noticed how impossible it is to think of him as liking anybody. Hasn't he a deliciously savage look? His disagreeableness filled me with curiosity. And I was afraid you would never help along a chance of meeting him again. Anyway, it just came right. And I asked him. And he said he would come."

"When is this to happen?"

"Of course I have to talk with Aunt Paul before fixing the night."

"And when are you going to consult me?"

"About what?"

"About asking Rudley."

She answered my look quite steadily. Perhaps she began to realize how eccentric her impulse had been. But she was contriving to ignore that—unless she had worked out a deliberate plan. The Sarah of the city

is even more difficult to figure out than that other Sarah of the Naugaway Valley.

"You know the way I feel," she said, coolly. "He would find a way not to come."

"Nonsense!" I said. "He'll come."

There was, in fact, nothing complicated about it. We are to have two guests to dinner on Wednesday night.

## V

I feel an awe in writing of that meeting between Sarah and Rudley. It may be a platitude to say that a germ of the momentous lies in any human meeting. Every thought must of course be a platitude from some angle. But these elemental facts prick us sometimes with the sharpness of an impinging blade. Maybe such circumstances are more like a caught electric current that suddenly sends an incandescence into our filaments. In a flash we have a luminous apprehension. Thought and feeling melt in emotion, and we *know*. . . .

Despite that whimsical pretense of reservation in which a man says that he may know facts about a woman, but never can really understand her, I should have said, under the right sort of challenge, that I was as thoroughly acquainted with Sarah as I well could be with any one. When Hazen quoted the great entomologist as saying that he knew all about ants that it was possible to know *without being an ant*, I remember thinking that there was a pretty good parallel in the matter of a man's interrogatory attitude toward the other sex. Nevertheless, Eckering gave me a little more of assurance by what he said of monism and "protoplasmic oneness." Individual differences, he maintained, were of the most superficial kind, regardless of sex or breed, when compared with basic likenesses.

But when I looked at Sarah's face as she shook hands

with Rudley I knew that I was just a masculine blunderer.

I am sure she had never looked like that before.

She has soft eyes; large, I should say, with a brightness that does not seem to come from the surface. They seem translucent in an unusual degree. Her look glows from within them, and the fibrous gray and green and mauve that blend in the nameless hue of the literal fact have a light that leaps straight. The thing that travels on that most potent wireless known to nature seems to contradict the softness. . . . I don't know how it should be put, but the brilliance seems to me wonderfully liquid, not only as to the dark pool of the pupil, but as to the flash of the whole effect.

When she looked at Rudley the difference was not so much a mere matter of slight, exquisitely slight, suffusion and that little flow of heightened color in the skin of the upper part of her face that gives such a changed quality to the eyes—not so much a heightening as a transmutation, mysterious to me and in a curious way thrilling. Her lips—they have a free curve that is full of vagaries—showed a deeper pink than usual, and their parting was amused, or defiant, or simply expectant—I couldn't have said which. Even that amber brown of her hair (she has no pride with it, no tricks of exploitation that I ever have detected, being content, evidently, to have it bound rather than conquered) became an appearance which I seemed never before to have estimated—never before to have *seen*.

She was wearing that new gown. If the lobster palace was a proper reflection it is in the mode, though I think one might say that it just escaped being as shocking as the mode appears to advise. Perhaps Sarah herself is the extenuation. (If Jimmy Kayne were here he would say that she looked like "a regular girl.") At all events, that shimmery Nile-green affair didn't hide Sarah's throat and shoulders nor the round litheness of her arms,



and there is no occasion to deny that God devised her handsomely. From head to foot she had an effect of having flowered magically into maturity.

I suppose I never had thought of Sarah as female. Possibly family closeness suspends or delays the sense of such a matter. To see her romping in overalls, shinning up trees, crawling through hedges, shoveling snow, inflicting the half-Nelson on a freckled boy, or vaulting a blood-curdling orbit with a clothes-pole, scarcely prepared me to expect that she ever would be any different. Even in her grown-up state, seeing her handle a class in first-year French was no more differentiating in its suggestions than seeing her humiliate some one at tennis. She was always just Sarah.

Evidently that needed touch was Rudley.

His hand was quick in its clasp, almost perfunctorily so, one might have said. There must have been something like embarrassment in the meeting under the circumstances. It was his look that lingered in the greeting, and I am not likely to forget that look, either. It helped me to understand Sarah, to objectify him more completely as a masculine image, to realize that I have lived much in a dream world with painted scenery.

Zorn having elected to wear an archaic frock-coat (as old, I believe, as the one my father saves for funerals), Rudley chose the informality of a dark sack-suit, thus supporting Aunt Paul's strategy in forbidding me to hazard dinner clothes.

In range of Rudley I might surely have been forgiven for consciousness of a disparity which, while it was not crushing—if it could be that a cripple wouldn't last—nevertheless gave me one of those momentary twinges of torturing envy which no opiates of philosophy can soften to the broken in the presence of the straight.

It fitted Rudley's boyish bigness that he should so soon be flinging at Sarah that she mustn't absent-mindedly call him "Biff." She came back with some-

thing—I've forgotten precisely what it was—that finished, so far as speech went, the recognition of the past happening. If I were Rudley I think that happening might still rankle. Perhaps he has acquired a facility in forgetting.

Zorn had seemed restless when he first came, as if resentful of an ordeal he might have avoided; not, I fancy, with that simple misgiving as to being bored which shines so plainly in some people, but rather as by a disturbed preoccupation or some obsessing anxiety.

He surveyed my aunt's dimensions with transparent astonishment. It was as if he were saying, "You fat creature!" Had he remained silent you would have felt that he actually had said it. What he did say as he hovered before her might well have been quite as disconcerting to any one else.

"Have you children, too?" he asked, in his peremptory way.

"No," said my aunt, cheerily, "not yet. Have you?"

Zorn looked at her fixedly and shook his head. "I've never married. . . ."

"We're quits!" cried my aunt. "Neither have I."

Zorn's face underwent one of those queer grimaces with which he fills an instant's interval. "I suppose we all ought to have children," he said, staring at the wall over my aunt's shoulder. "Parenthood does something valuable for the souls of the parents. But then there are the children. Being born isn't so necessary to them."

"I've known them to grow up and say that," remarked my aunt.

"A scientific man," continued Zorn (still looking at the wall), "once said of photography that he would like it better if it weren't for the pictures. But then he was a scientific man. I can sympathize with him to an extent. Birth might be less questionable but for the conditions of living."

"You will feel better about it," returned Aunt Paul, "when you've had your dinner."

The flow of this grotesque bit of dialogue was, indeed, checked by the image of Hilda between the curtains.

When presently we all were at the round table—a favoring device when there is an odd number—I could see that Zorn was disposed to have second thoughts about my aunt . . . for example, that she might be something more than a corpulent organism. And my aunt, while piqued, I dare say, by the oddity of Zorn, and influenced by a natural sense of something in him that deserved response where it did not demand agility, was plainly under the influence of an antecedent curiosity about Rudley. . . . There was no Sarah to make Zorn imperative. Any sardonic pleasantry about the Single grows tenuous enough in the presence of the Elemental Picture. I wondered whether my aunt's mind was doing that which my mind was doing, admiring and resenting Rudley at the same moment—resenting any glance he gave Sarah; resenting the quick easiness of both of them, the sudden facile audacity fledged by their mere nearness. Seeing him there, laughing, tossing light words, or speaking with that warm, sincere, magnetic inflection that seems to be as characteristic as his energetic humor—above all, seeing the high, unhampered confidence shining in him, gave me a sharp turn. I could hear my thought saying: "You don't know this man at all. He hasn't been proved innocent. The man who sits by Sarah should be as clean as Sarah. What is the real measure of the man you have connived at pushing into her path? A gambler . . . with a story clanking out of his past. How do you know that the unknown part of him is not worse than the known part—so much worse that to have him here, with Sarah, exercising, perhaps, a charm that has some sinister quality behind it, may not amount to a monstrous folly? Are you really as innocent as Sarah says you are?"

And yet I knew that I liked him. There seems to be no doubt that Sarah likes him. If Aunt Paul's glances and challenges did not mean liking, they bore the marks of a real interest.

My aunt has a trick (the crafty psychoanalysts have tried to reduce the expedient to a science) of setting people going, by questions or expressions of opinion in themselves as simple and plausible as a clock key, and then of watching their wheels go round. Not necessarily in any disrespect. She wants to know what time it is with them. Her secondary process is much more incisive, and constitutes the real point in her game. I should have to use another image to explain that this secondary process seems to consist in picking out of inconsequential things they say fragments that go to explain the hidden parts of them—parts hidden, perhaps, even from themselves. This might sound as if my aunt were a conscious psychiatrist, or whatever such an experimenter might be. Of course I mean nothing of the sort. She is just a keen woman, X-ray-ing intuitively, cheerfully, by a feminine process older than Freud, and without eagerness. Especially without eagerness. She doesn't want anything badly enough to strain a ligament reaching for it.

Whatever postponed feelings she might have about Zorn, I knew that it was Rudley she wanted to understand. I don't believe she succeeded. But she went about the business beautifully.

It was hugely entertaining to watch her while Rudley swung through a rattling story about Arizona, diagramming the adventure with a salt-cellar, a fork, and a leaf fallen from the little centerpiece vase. . . .

"Here was the burro—an ugly devil with a peevish mouth and the eyes of an affectionate gazelle—and there was Hutch with his three-fingered right hand holding down the Sorora chap. Then, suddenly, from somewhere over about as far as you, Miss Rowning, or say between

you and Zorn, came a deuce of a screeching sound, one of those . . .”

“Wait a moment,” interposed Sarah. “I thought you said that Hutch was running back for his gun.”

Rudley shook his head in mock sadness. “You naven’t been listening—that was Mattrey.”

Sarah had the last word. “You might have borrowed my fork and made it clear.”

At this Zorn laughed. I hadn’t heard him laugh before, and the thing became fantastically illuminating. It resulted in my noticing that it was upon Sarah that those queer eyes of his were fastened while Rudley went to the end of his adventure.

I have forgotten how it came about, but Aunt Paul told one of her best stories, an experience at a tea-house somewhere in India. Dramatically it was hurt a bit at the end by a fizzle on the part of the Swedish person, who is strongly averse to any excitement, and who revealed her condition of mind by bumping the cage of the parrot.

Zorn evidently had his question ready. “When were you in India?”

My aunt figured. “In . . . nineteen six.”

“I was there the year before,” said Zorn. Then, after a pause, “It is a sad country.”

As I would have expected, my aunt didn’t care to know at this juncture how sad any country was, and she sought to get into safer longitudes by asking Zorn if he had ever been in Brazil. I’m puzzled to know why she chose Brazil. But it didn’t matter. Zorn held fast to India.

“. . . a sad country,” he repeated. “It can’t last. It is an anachronism. You can’t stifle a whole people like that. No; it can’t be done. And England knows it. . . . I beg your pardon”—he turned to my aunt—“you asked me if I had been . . . where? In Brazil?”

No. I should like to have seen some of it. But it's too late. I shall never see any more countries."

"Nonsense!" declared my aunt. "You don't mean—"

"I mean," said Zorn, "that there is trouble enough without hunting for it. There is no happy country. You can't get away from the cry of humanity. You may run from it. It's like running from yourself. It meets you everywhere."

"Good heavens!" cried Aunt Paul. "What a depressing idea! Of course there is whimpering. But didn't you hear the *songs*?"

There was something in this rather poetic protest of my aunt that checked Zorn for a moment. He flushed as if about to say something bitter, and evidently changed his mind.

"I know," he said. "I'm a fool. In half an hour or so I must leave you because of something the war has done. We aren't in that ghastly mess—I hope we may not be—but it has reached out to do some frightful things to people here . . . thousands of miles away from it. I'm a fool to get tangled in such things, an utter fool. I know it. Rudley, there, is good enough to remind me of this fact at appropriate intervals. . . ."

"You're right I do!" said Rudley, in a gay tone. "And I've half a mind to forbid you to leave here on any old errand whatever. This man," and he summoned us all to contemplate Zorn—"this man . . ."

Zorn made a gesture. "I could tell you a story" . . . he was looking intently at Sarah . . . "directly out of life, the life right here around us, that will . . . but it would be, as Miss—eh—Rowning has said, rather depressing. This is not the place for it. No. It is not the place . . . or the time."

"I permit you to tell it to Grayl later for his book," said Rudley, rather cruelly, I thought.

"His book?" Zorn caught this with a disconcerting

quickness. He turned keenly to me. "Are you writing a book?"

"In all humility," I said.

"I hope not," was his protest to this. "Don't be humble about it—I don't believe you are. You don't look humble at all. I hope your looks don't belie you. *Think* with humility, my friend. Pray to God with humility, if you do that sort of thing—pray to your own soul with humility. But for God's sake *write* with arrogance! Humble art is a horror. Can you imagine a truckling masterpiece? If you can you may imagine a cyclone that inquires the way, or a sea tide that begs your pardon."

"Don't worry about Anson, Mr. Zorn," Sarah chirped, with her mischievous look. "He'll be cocky enough when he gets started."

"In the first book, anyway," amended my aunt. "In the later ones, after the drubbings, he may be defiant, but the arrogance is to be doubted. Wait until they get at him and tell all the things his book *isn't*."

I suggested that these personalities were in very bad taste.

"I believe you are right," Zorn declared, seriously. "And I hope you won't take offense if I say that I hope your book won't be too impeccable in that matter of taste. There is a special hell for books in perfect taste."

"Oh, say!" cried Rudley. "Aren't you a little early in consigning Gray? Old man"—turning to me—"he deserves to have you hand him some of the rough stuff right now—a good walloping sample."

We got away from this foolish topic—dinner talk is a journey that is all sidings—by the route of Sarah's discovery that we had said never a word about the old days at the Academy. Rudley did not kindle at this spark, though he made some appreciative allusion. Zorn's presence hardly made that sort of reminiscence a desirable indulgence. However, the switching came

about again in a natural enough way by the coming of the coffee and a droll little Algerian tray with the tobacco. (It was my aunt, rounder than she is, who had reminded me to acquire these supplies. A man who doesn't smoke is notoriously neglectful of such decencies.)

Rudley preferred a cigarette. Zorn, after an instant's hesitation, asked if any one would feel insulted if he lighted a cigar he had in his pocket, adding, with more of sophistry than I had yet heard him use, that it would only get broken if he neglected it longer. And so he had the black, snub-nosed thing he really wanted, and was soon, to my aunt's immense amusement, throwing out, like a submarine-baited liner, a smoke screen of appalling opacity.

"I hope," said the voice from the cloud, "that I may give no offense if I say that I'm glad you ladies don't smoke."

"Well," remarked my aunt, "I hope I may give no offense if I say that I have not been actuated by the hope of that reward."

"I see," said Zorn, with something that for him amounted to a chuckle. "Of course not." He paused long enough to become visible again and was to be discerned as beaming almost admiringly upon my aunt.

"You know," he went on, "I have heard them say, 'All the women smoke now,' and concrete variations are interesting on that account particularly."

Aunt Paul's opinion was that "sets" smoked rather extensively, but that sets are an insignificant item in the population.

Sarah cut in with, "I want the privilege, but I don't care for the tobacco."

"In the presence of both," said Rudley, "you ought to feel that you are doing as you choose."

"I am," said Sarah.

Zorn went away soon after we left the table.

His apology to my aunt may have been affected by



the suddenness of his decision that the time had come. At all events, it was an original and precipitate matter.

In view of what happened after he had gone, I wish now that he had stayed longer. His being there would somehow have helped me to get an angle. . . .

## VI

That picture of Sarah at the piano and Rudley looking down at her was trite enough as a picture. Many a time I had seen Sarah's fingers flickering over the keys in the midst of a bunch of bellowing youngsters, or guiding by the leading-string of an emphasized melody some vociferous warbling chap in whom music was so much more a wish than a faculty. I had seen them singly and in groups hang about while she let loose in a strident thing that took their fancy, or hover quelled and mystified while she evoked some soft fantasy in which it was plain that she forgot her hearers altogether.

Nevertheless, that particular picture of the Eternal Two seemed utterly novel. It made me as dumb as an embarrassed stranger. To have that queer new sense of potentiality in Sarah, of something in her image that quivered like an aura in action, was to feel like accusing her of an indefinable immodesty. I knew that the idea was absurd, but her frock began to seem indelicate, the bare of her neck and shoulders to look brazen, profligate. . . .

As for Rudley, his very frankness and comradery, his way of seeming to have dropped into this amazing relationship as lightly as one might take a hand in a game of bridge, gave me a damn-your-impudence feeling.

Of course there was a sort of background. Rudley is an alumnus of the Academy. There is nothing against that part of his record. The old summer home of the Rudleys is one of the landmarks of our county. He had been mistakenly abused by Sarah, though he had no

right to take advantage of that. He was meeting Sarah under scrutiny and by no apparent connivance of his own.

All the same, there I was fidgeting at last as if I had been tricked and bagged. Something had been started which suddenly began to look like more than I had bargained for. My liking him was not in question. One may like a man—oh, yes! one may go a long way in liking a man without wanting to hang his sister about that man's neck.

There was no excuse for accusing him of going farther than Sarah, unless one figured that in a quiet way he was deliberately working a charm which it would be easy to believe he has in his equipment. There is an effect in his smile and there is a note in his laugh of which even a man can feel the fascination, the more probably because he has no traditional handsomeness. Heaven knows a pretty man would have a small chance with Sarah.

Quite likely, as I look at it now, Sarah simply enjoyed what she was doing. That is woman's elemental habit, the basis of her immemorial answer. If consequences are far enough away women are not concerned about them. Women make no diagrams. They can ignore consequences because they deny sequences. They play with fire, but if the house burns down they blame Providence. They like to live by promissory notes without a date.

Perhaps this is a means of being delightful. When a man does the same thing we call him hard names. We ask him to be logical. And when he is logical he stops being delightful. We call children the real poets, then proceed to hammer their dreams into a shapeless mess by way of teaching them consequences. That Great Wish to be happy must, I suppose, always carry its persistent When? Life's habit of translating great wishes into deferred hopes is a trick women in particular have

a way of recognizing with impatience. They are best at understanding the Now. . . .

Sarah is a Now person.

"You know," she said to me on a certain occasion, "you told me once that always it is Now—that the future is merely a region of potential Nows. Isn't it wonderful how I can remember those high-brow things?"

She is capable of quoting me to justify anything.

Aunt Paul's opinion of what she saw in those two figures at the piano I made no headway in surmising. She would never be a restraint in the awkward sense. She is the best sort of company, an appreciator rather than a critic, though her appreciations can cut, too.

It is true that I have heard her say that she didn't like "snaky" music, the kind that smells too strongly of brandy and cigarettes. She knows enough about music not to be fooled. When the composer is a crook she knows it. This is her way of paying tribute to music as a real art, not only adequate for all expression, but as much responsible for what it says as any other art. Yet she has always insisted that she is capable of liking music with the devil in it—a healthy devil.

I am sure she has always liked a little of the healthy devil in Sarah—at least in her playing and in her talk.

I am sure she liked the way Sarah played for Rudley and that she was not disturbed by this extraordinary illumination of Sarah. Whether she liked seeing Rudley there, whether she was considering what might come of it (with the next-door part of the business in mind), I couldn't make out.

In fact, she was a bit illuminated herself.

It was she who most promptly seconded Rudley's suggestion that we all get together in a "good sing." Rudley said he was "just hungry for a howl."

And so it happened that the quartet of us actually

crept, stumbled, and wiggled into a kind of harmony that lacked nothing in volume once the co-ordination was completed.

"Here you, Anson!" cried Rudley, at the end of that first school song, "hit it up! You're not doing your share. A little more punch in that tenor."

"I see," I said. "You want simply loudness."

Sarah's buoyant treble, like an airplane in the blue; my aunt's contralto (with a ripe humor in it); and a kind of joyously bullying barytone from Rudley—deserved a better contribution than I could accomplish. But we did, I fancy, make an amiable noise. We sang "Tipperary," and "Home Fires," and one of the Hippodrome things, with much more, old and new, and were in such hearty running "somewhere in G," as Rudley put it, that it was a small miracle to have heard, as I did, the twitter of the telephone.

I slipped away, leaving the trio to carry the responsibilities of the song, and gave ear to the voice of Alonzo, the night elevator boy.

"Miss Sherrick calling."

The pause before I said, "Have her come up," might easily have been longer. I'm not accustomed to the gear clutches of city machinery, and I felt an involuntary repugnance to any complication of the present situation. But of course there was no way out.

I was obliged to interrupt the song.

"You have a visitor," I said to Sarah.

"Who?" She swung about on the piano bench.

"Miss Sherrick."

I rather doubt that Rudley heard the name. My impression is that he turned to say something to my aunt at the moment it was pronounced. This would have no importance save that I was sent back to that moment when I undertook to analyze my recollection of his expression when he saw the visitor.

We were all standing in an interrupted way when

Sarah, her cordialities heightened by excitement, bustled in with her caller.

"Aunt Paul, this is my Laura Sherrick . . ." We were each identified, and each received a hand that came with an easy energy of action, and met a pair of cool, deep-blue eyes, brilliant in the spirit of tourmalin, with rich lashes and a kind of searching friendliness that amounted almost to a challenge.

As it happened, Rudley came last by the accident of his position in the group. He saw before he was seen, and his suddenly fixed expression might have passed for a particularly ardent degree of admiration, astonishment, or curiosity, but for the sign I saw in her as they shook hands, each mentioning the other's name with what seemed to me a significant clearness.

I may be wrong; I should hate to give Sarah the excuse for calling me suspicious, and hate much more to be suspicious; but if Rudley and Laura Sherrick had not met before, if they have not known each other, I must have been affected by some foolish imaginative strain under which I went through mental motions that would afterward make me a very bad witness. If they have known each other, their concealment of the fact is not reassuring as to either.

An unheralded call at this hour was evidently without oddity to Laura Sherrick. Certainly she laid no stress on that point. It had come into her head to see Sarah, to locate her; also, as it turned out, to ask her to go with her to-morrow night to some gathering where they were to have a great Russian author.

She said author, but I wondered if she meant some feverish revolutionist—which may have been part of the suspicious twist that had been given to my impressions.

When Sarah said, "We've been having a song fest," Miss Sherrick remarked: "How jolly! I hope you won't stop."

She is a marvelously poised person, this Laura Sherrick,

with an effect of enameled wisdom. She wore the smallest hat I have ever seen on a girl—a mere skull-cap affair from beneath which her gleaming brown hair, longer than I had remembered in the picture, but still bobbed in a juvenile way, floated out to the framing of her face. I saw through the parting of her heavily furred coat that she wore a bright-green blouse sort of garment. The emerald note was repeated at the ankles. Once, in the ante-metropolis days, I should have thought this theatrical. Yet the most striking thing about the girl was her quiet; a flaming quiet, if that is thinkable, yet a quiet; a control that was almost demure. I wondered if she was what would be called magnetic. I suppose I have always thought of magnetic women as having a smoldering effect. Yet a magnet is a cool and shiny thing—like Laura Sherrick.

The gesture by which she plucked off the cap and dropped it on a near-by cabinet struck me as entirely unconscious. This was at the approach of my aunt to urge the removal of her wrap.

And so we became five again and sought to recast our evening.

Sarah was so eager to have us apprehend the wonder of Miss Sherrick that she was less effective than usual in help to that end. Her admiring eyes told plainly of a wish to lead us all to the feet of the idol thus suddenly dropped into the midst. As so often happens under such circumstances, the idol didn't seem to perform very well. She is good to look at, and I suppose she is clever. But something prevented her from sparkling. For the matter of that, we all were rather poor performers in those first moments.

Rudley hung silently in the background during Miss Sherrick's colloquy with my aunt and while Sarah drew me into talk about New York—by the neck, as you might say, through the use of a violent quotation.

“Don't you like New York?” asked Miss Sherrick.

"If you mean the place," I said, "I think it is an Arabian Nights dream, with a little of the nightmare touch. If you mean the people, I don't know them yet. It's a big job getting acquainted."

"Well," drawled my aunt, "if you hold off until you've met them all—"

"I know what you mean," declared Miss Sherrick, looking in my direction. "You're fair enough. If you were a foreign visitor you'd have to pass an opinion before you had passed Liberty down the Bay."

"And have said," added my aunt, "with utter originality, that it suggested the Alhambra."

It wasn't fair, in Miss Sherrick's view, to tote people into New York by the southern waterway. New York couldn't live up to the promise of that angle.

I suggested that the procedure might be a matter of temperamental obligations. A pessimist should come into a city by the back door. In that way he starts with the joy of being confirmed in his low expectations. You may be able to do something with him later. Whereas, if you humiliate him at first he'll get even by finding increasingly confirmatory disenchantment in everything he meets thereafter. On the other hand, you may safely bring your optimist in at the front door. An optimist carries his front doors about with him.

Miss Sherrick's smile was as if this made her think of something she didn't say. Then she suddenly threw off some of that ivory quiet. She flung out her hands with an encompassing gesture.

"New York is the biggest hypocrite of them all!"

"How did *you* come in?" inquired my aunt.

We all laughed at this.

"Maybe I hope to go out by the front door," said Miss Sherrick, "and look back—once."

"That's all Mrs. Lot did," murmured my aunt, and Sarah exclaimed, in the same breath, "Then you can't be a real pessimist."

"No," said Miss Sherrick, quietly. "I don't think I'm a pessimist. And I don't think I'm that worst object of all, a disappointed optimist—*that* sort is hopeless. I guess I'm only an orderly rebel."

"But where shall you go," asked Rudley, with an intent look, "when you leave by the front door?"

The bobbed hair fluttered as Miss Sherrick faced about to glance at Rudley.

"Where? Anywhere—maybe back into some strait-jacket of a village."

"Or you might get into some ship," suggested my aunt, in that way she has of rounding you up, "and become the Girl Without a Country."

Miss Sherrick turned to my aunt with a queer little laugh. "How picturesque! I suppose I deserve the punishment—not the punishment of the exile, but the punishment of having you suggest that."

Aunt Paul protested gently.

"Oh, I know the tiresomeness of complaints about the dreadful city. Of course New York isn't dreadful at all. It's mostly stupid—just a dear old fool."

I urged that she give herself a little more time. A great American philosopher wrote a poem, "Good-by, Proud World, I'm Going Home," when he was twenty-three or thereabouts. At seventy he thought we were all a pretty good sort.

Her only reply to this was:

"Isn't it absurd the zigzag talk takes? But being Americans, we can't talk politics. Being New-Yorkers, we know nothing about the United States. Being Christians, we can't talk religion. Being respectable, we can't talk about sex. Being New-Thoughters, we can't talk about our aches and pains. Being rather comfortable, there's no fun talking about poverty. And being bored and cautious, most of us can't talk about the war. Really, there isn't much left, is there?"

"Excepting something to eat," said my aunt, in her



cheery, brushing-aside-the-debris manner. "We're going to have a snack."

The snack included a choice of grape-juice, port, and beer, with cheese and wafers. Sarah, as usual, was hungry. I noticed that neither Miss Sherrick nor Rudley accomplished more than a pretense of nibbling.

The huge advantage of food in a disconcerted evening is that it makes pauses plausible. It is hurrying to fill the gaps that spoils so much conversation. A terrifying hiatus is never germinative like something to munch. So that our fortunes looked up appreciably by means of this lubricant. Rudley came out of his quiet with an infectious story about the Italians and their onions in the new Subway cavern. Even Laura Sherrick had for this a quick, unreserved laugh that made her seem less metallic and mysterious. She went farther. She asked if she might smoke a cigarette. I took this to mean that we were collectively elected.

My aunt gave a keen glance to the technic of the cigarette incident. As a spectacle this was truly the sort of thing you would like if you liked that sort of thing. I remember that it was just after she had liberated a serpentine trickle of smoke from between those disquieting lips that Miss Sherrick remarked to me, abruptly:

"I suspect you of liking to read people. But don't try to guess me to-night. You would get it wrong."

I reminded her that I had put myself on record as for slowly formed judgments.

"But that was for me," she retorted. "A man's advice to a woman doesn't even remotely indicate his own practices. You know that."

"Cynic!" I said.

"Quibbler!" she murmured through a particularly delicate spiral of smoke.

When she stood up to go Rudley slipped away to his own quarters for his hat and coat. His move occasioned

Sarah's remark that he lived in the next apartment—a piece of information which, for some reason, Miss Sherrick received with a look of special interest.

"I don't want any one to go home with me." She turned to Rudley as he came back. "You're very kind, but—"

"You will permit me—" Rudley began.

But she shook her head with a quiet finality no one could misinterpret.

"It's a bad theory, this seeing able-bodied women home. Let me have my prejudices."

I thought Rudley winced. At all events, he was defeated. He appeared subdued when he himself left us a little later, though he made a jovial parting speech.

I wish I knew whether Miss Sherrick and Rudley had met before.

## VII

It was natural that when I again caught a glimpse, this morning, of the girl at the window she should have a different meaning. No, not different. Let us say more meaning. Somehow bringing her into comparison or association with Sarah and Laura Sherrick gave her a new vividness. She gleamed in that wall of houses like *essonite* set in bronze, or a bit of lonesome larkspur in the gray corner of a garden.

She wore a pale gown, a loose, flowing thing, in which a design that may be embroidery made me think of the silhouettes printed by sunlight through a fringe of leaves. Her hair was braided (that expedient forbidden by St. Paul). There were two braids, in fact. One of these she held in her fingers. Perhaps she was tying some bit of ribbon at the end.

I wonder what she reads. I wonder what she thinks when she stares into the street. . . . I wonder what she does in those hours of her invisibility. On Sunday mornings she goes to church with the hovering lady. Is she

besieged by would-be lovers? Does she ever go to lobster palaces? Does she dance, or quiver in the frenzies of bridge? Is it possible to think of her as smoking, for example, at the Ritz, at the Copper Kettle, or in a secret sacristy behind that window-pane?

Here is the grotesque miracle: She may look like this, yet be anything and do anything you like to fancy. A bewildering triumph for liberalism. No twist of the Japanese girdle to say, "I am still a maiden." No trick of coiffure or robe to say, "I have passed this age, or I am of this caste or that." We have chucked the insignia, rubbed away the shackling names, and invested her with the glittering mysteries of the Ineffable Girl.

There is a kind of symbolism in such a glimpse—Woman framed by the City. (There is a "lead" in this for the Book.) . . .

I can recall several charming stories of window love-affairs. There was one of a code of signals, built up the way prisoners build alphabets out of nothing in signaling through a thick wall. Then there was one of a string run across that carried precious, pulsating letters. And that story of the pigeon. . . .

These would be on a different sort of street. And not with a girl like Felicia.

What would happen if a man could handle life the way he handles a written thing? Suppose I were to stalk across the street, push that button beside the door, and say to the maid (she would be startled, of course): "Don't announce me. I have a little surprise for Miss Felicia." Suppose I dashed up-stairs, knowing just where she was, and popped into that front room, breezily, as you might say, but without any effect likely to offend her as vulgarly melodramatic. And suppose I were to say to her this:

"Felicia, I have seen you many times, always with immense interest. Something subconscious that isn't reasoning at all (you know how dangerous reasoning is)

has steadily deepened that interest. At this moment I am profoundly in love with you. You may judge of the degree of this passion by the extraordinary violence of this method. If you knew me better you would be still more likely to know how violent the method is. I am not in the least that sort of a person—commonly. I am equally certain that under ordinary circumstances you would be quite as averse by habit and preference to anything that might be construed as flippant or fantastic. But listen for a moment to *your* subconsciousness. Marriage is a lottery mostly because people fuss too much about the choice. Divine chance is frustrated by a solemn and amazingly futile artifice of selection. While a clumsy world is chattering about courtships or mumbling about eugenics, let us suddenly, with a noble confidence, yield ourselves to the dictates of a sublime intuition that is wholly unsullied by purpose. It is true that I have a broken back. But, after all, that is not so bad as a broken heart. Oh no, Felicia! Not nearly so bad. The really terrible thing would be that any one should have both. I'm sure you wouldn't wish to bring that about, would you? Of course not. The great point is, that without my knowing anything about you except that you knit and that you are absurdly beautiful, and without your knowing anything about me except that I have a broken back and a superhuman courage, we should be accentuating the high spiritual completeness of our submission to the divine order. . . ."

A man just *did* go to that door . . . an elderly man, with a heavily furred coat. He wears gray spats and steps briskly.

This is a very matter-of-fact street.

## PART THREE

### *The Hidden River*

#### I

A MAN might be halted in writing of certain things happening to himself if he did not feel in these things the touch of drama. Thus I might pass over my meeting with Major Whelan this afternoon if an incident of that visit had not already begun a strange coloration. That incident—a very simple incident—begins to color the figures in this narrative. It begins to color the city . . . in a way, to color life, to symbolize certain phases of the eternal Wish.

If this is true, then the incident, though it may belong only to the drama of myself, should be noted here.

It must be, of course, that there is for each of us a drama of himself—in any case, the drama of his desire, a drama big or little by its feel to him.

As for the drama that is apparently outside of ourselves, how are we honestly to measure it?—how tell what is worth the telling, what must be told to make the page honest?

Perhaps it is with the dramatic as it is with the picturesque. A picturesque thing is a thing that suggests pictures. But shall this mean pictures that *have* been made or pictures that *are* to be made? Most of us, I'm afraid, are looking back—making definitions out of debris. When they began building New York's skyscrapers there was an almost unanimous chorus of horror from the artists. Then, after a long time, it seems that some one called them "towers." Where-

upon there began to appear an amazing transformation of sentiment. Pennell was etching the naked steel bones of uncompleted structures once called "monstrosities," and adulation (in the phrase of my aunt) whispered, "Alhambra!" By all accounts Art wept when the elevated roads were built, because pictures never had been made of elevated roads. If now these were taken away it may be that Art would weep again for the loss of the last surviving magic of urban picturesqueness.

And so I suppose that properly it is the kind of thing that *has* been made into drama that is dramatic. In that case the word would not be a flame for a headlight, but a flicker for the tail of the train. Nevertheless, because I am writing of things I have felt as well as of things I have seen, because I am handcuffed to no theory either of books or of words, because I am more interested in men than in either (and can afford the splendid complacency of saying so), I turn for a moment to my little incident.

When I drew into the major's street I caught sight of the major himself standing in a rapt attitude before a ragged hole representing the sockets from which had been extracted two houses like the major's own a little farther down the street.

I was halted on my way to the brink of the excavation by noticing something in the scene that differed from the ordinary effect of such city surgery. There was a monolith of bricks to be shaped into a new city hive. There were barrels of lime, pyramids of sand, and a green tool-house lettered with the contractor's name. But there were also an engine and the gulping of a pump. A stream of yellow water followed the gutter until it found a sewer gap at the corner.

A group of boys scuffled over a fleet of impromptu boats (one of them with a mast and a flag) that swirled convulsively in the muddy torrent. The game came to

a crisis before the supreme peril of that maw at the corner, but there were many intervening hazards, for obstructive bricks and islands of mud had been introduced by way of slowing and diverting the stream. There was no way of being sure that a ship would not run aground or lose headway in an eddy, so that if you had, in championship of your very own craft, bet a cent, or an agate, or even a jack-knife with a blade only slightly damaged, you had to face great odds. Something of this was to be gathered from the shrill excitement of the group. . . .

(I have sailed ships in the Mauraug, which is not like a gutter. Evidently it makes no difference where you find your ripples of romance. The gutter seems to do just as well. . . . Perhaps it leaves still more to the imagination. Another step and we should have pure poetry . . . as where we sail our ships on the kitchen table.)

The major's greeting impressed me as something that had called him out of a deep preoccupation.

He jerked his thumb toward the disordered hollow.

"A bit of calamity," he said. "And nobody's fault but the man who invented tall buildings. While they were content with an every-day basement and cellar nothing happened—sand here and solid rock up-town. Then they want tall buildings and must go deeper. Right enough principle. The plant that rears itself high reaches far down or far out for support. But the tall building can't have wide roots. It can only go down. The earth rebels sometimes at these intrusions—plays all sorts of tricks. Here's a case." He pointed into the cavern. "A hidden river."

"A what?" was my incredulous exclamation.

"A smart little stream, too," said the major. "They tackled it first with a small pump. Now here is a big one also, working night and day, clanking as I go to sleep, still clanking when I wake up in the morning."

I peered over the edge of the barrier, and saw the yellow pool and the leaping stream, as from a severed artery, that fed it from midway of the space.

"The pumps," said the major, "have been going for four months, while twentieth-century ingenuity—that boasted mastery of physical forces—has been puttering over ways and means to conquer that little hidden river that has had its secret bared at last. Of course it had been proceeding quietly about its business, 'running somewhere safe to sea,' since the Dutch came to Manhattan, bringing Santa Claus and public schools with them, and cheating New England out of that much glory. And what a lot of trouble that trout-brook sort of thing has made! Do you see the houses shored up on each side and new foundation walls wedged in? Do you see these shafts, and cement-pits, and this jumble of stuff I don't understand at all—so that they can get at the real game before freezing weather?" The major chuckled. "Cocksureness!" He waved his hand toward a sign high on the raw wall of the eastern house.

The sign said, "These apartments will be ready for occupancy November First."

"And they're not to the street level," grunted the major, "with November slipping away!"

Something elicited my second glance at the sign. It was the last row of letters—"The Rudley Corporation." One of the spawnings of that prolific commercial monster parented by Rudley's father. . . .

Even the suggestiveness of this discovery, and the major's more than usually pungent talk on other matters to which we soon drifted, did not obliterate a sense of allegory in the hidden river . . . running like an unrecognized, unnamed, yet fundamental and persistent current beneath the shell of a city's life.

When we go deep through the pretenses and make-shifts and incrustated hypocrisies of humanity we are likely to strike one of these elemental currents. And



then there is a scurrying mess! It won't be strangled. Try to do this, and you undermine foundations. Lead it into the light, and how it bubbles in brazen joy of its published liberty!

Take your eugenics or birth control or other secret currents of human thought—uncover them, perhaps by some accident of controversy, or some deliberate delving by a restless revolutionary, and how the liberated stream sprawls and reaches, unchecked by the arrest and conviction of the revolutionary, and furnishing at last a living surface on which jesters float their wit as the boys their boats in the gutter! . . .

Or take the stream of hot greed, flowing under the crust of a befuddled Europe. When the crust is broken by a bullet, a nasty bit of lead in the one possible right place—good God! what a horror! How the flood has spurted, flaming like so much molten hell, shriveling and defiling, running amuck into the fair valleys, piling up heaps of human flesh over which, in the night, quivering phosphorescent specters make the living shudder!

And we here, with an ocean between, are presently to have another merry Christmas! . . .

## II

The major spoke of the war. One doesn't go far without speaking of it nowadays. And one doesn't go far with the major without finding that he has no affection for England. He has that vivid Irish way of speaking of England as if it were a person. He says Her, but it is plain enough that his image is of Him, a hulking, domineering, sin-stained Him, historically selfish, incurably obstinate, pontifically insulting.

I had no wish to argue with the major. Or if I had a wish, I had a wholesome fear of unpleasant consequences. He is a vehement man. He makes me feel very young, not only by his years, but by his extraordinary quick-

on-the-trigger knowledge of past and present, his electric readiness with the argumentative shillalah.

It was when we had reached his house that he became most violent on the subject of the war and "England's trickery." England, as usual, was selfish clean through, saving her own hide, working her own game. Defending Belgium, saving France? Faugh! Nothing to that, my lad. Don't be hoodwinked by the old claptrap. It is for England's benefit that England's fighting, make sure of that. Can you believe anything else? Look at the Boer War and all the rest of it. Prating, as usual, about noble humanitarian aims. Rot! The rottenest kind of rot. England has only one aim—to be cock of the roost, to rule the waves, and the solid land, too, when she can grab it.

"You're only a kid," cried the major. "But you must have read a little. You couldn't be the son of your father and not have done a bit of thinking. Have you thought about England—sniveling her appeals for help from *us*!—wanting *us* to help her pull her chestnuts out of the fire! What do you really think now? Have they bedeviled you?"

I was in a corner.

My knowledge of the case was not so profound as his, I told the major. Really, I didn't understand Ireland at all.

"Who said Ireland?" demanded the major.

"Well," I answered, with hesitation, "if there wasn't your Ireland I suppose there wouldn't be your England, either."

"I don't get you," said the major.

"It is what England has done to Ireland that bothers you, isn't it, Major?" I hurried on to say that to me it seemed unjust to think of England as one might a person who in his earlier days had been guilty of unpardonable crimes. He would correct me if I was wrong—but how cruel had Englishmen now living been to Ire-

land? Had not modern England made some effort to be just, or at least humanly fair, to Ireland? Was Ireland itself agreed as to what it wanted from to-day's England in atonement for what yesterday's England had done?

Then the hidden river of the major's resentment was loosed. I made out that I was a pitiful example of what England had done to the thinking of honest men (he didn't say "honest fools," but his phrase had that flavor). The major plunged into the black record of England's crimes. He raised his thick, hairy hands as if to show them dripping with bloody testimony. He went back to Dermot of MacMurrough, to the Earl of Desmond, to Emmet and O'Connell, to the Boyne and Drogheda and Dolly's Brae and the Great Rebellion. I saw the iron claw of England crashing through the white brow of Irish liberty. I was invited to scan the ghastly trailing devastation of England's greedy despotism. The picture was unfolded with a passionate swiftness as of something unfolded a thousand times before. The words leaped like flames, and they burned deep into my sense of a situation that was, of course, sadly vague to me.

"And you say 'men now living'!" cried the major, in an amazing crisis of denunciation. "Why, in the year I was born they were hanging and transporting! Do you think Ireland has suffered nothing in my time? Didn't I watch them pack the prisons when I was a boy? If you think the fangs of the beast have been drawn or that he has somehow gone through a miraculous spiritualization, look at Casement. There's a spectacle of cruel stupidity to wring a groan from the gods."

"But, Major," I said, "wasn't this for a stab in the back while an honest fight was going on?"

"An honest fight? No! Never! England never was in an honest fight. Honest fighting isn't her game at all. She isn't honest in this war. Just another dam-

nable, self-seeking, blundering English trick—and trying to drag Ireland in by the heels, and to seduce America besides. Holy saints! What a mockery! If there were nincompoops enough over here I suppose we should have been handed over to England's help—by the scruff of the neck if necessary.”

“Then you would be for letting Belgium and France—”

“I wouldn't help England if there were twenty Belgians!” shouted the major.

I stood up, and found myself twisting my hat rather violently.

A strange picture began forming itself in my mind. I forgot about Ireland altogether.

“Major,” I said, standing before him, “here's the way it would look to me—”

“Go on. You have a right.” He gesticulated with his pipe.

“To me it seems like this: Let us suppose that on the next block a big brute with brass knuckles on one hand and with a sheath-knife in the other began an attack on his neighbors. A cry of alarm runs through the street. Several men rush to intercept the brute. As they come up he is stamping on the face of a baby and slashing at its mother with the knife. He swings with his brass knuckles at the would-be rescuers. They have nothing to match his equipment. The street is splashed with blood. At this moment a weeping woman, whose children are huddled where they cannot escape, appeals to you to add your help and to save her children. ‘Madam,’ you say, with splendid self-command, ‘I realize that this is a dreadful affair. With my help that brute could perhaps be conquered and your children saved. But there is an awkward circumstance to which I must call your attention and which prevents my participation. *I dislike one of those men who have gone to the rescue.*’”

“Damn your New England impertinence!” snorted

the major, smiting the table beside him. "That's a very fine piece of mawkish balderdash. You're a worthy champion of the deceitful old monster—the real monster in the game. The trouble with your pretty piece of work is this . . ."

I didn't learn what the trouble was, for we were interrupted by the coming of the major's daughter, a tall, bony woman topped by a wonderful black-plumed hat. She is the widow of an alderman.

When I had been introduced the major burst out with: "There, lad! We mustn't come to blows. We'll stop at the hard names!"

The storm had passed from old Whelan's face. But I was sorry. Sorry we had wrangled. Sorry I really know so little about Ireland—that England is a blunderer. Sorry for evidence of unconquerable bitterness in the world.

### III

Did I come to the city at the best or the worst time?

Will the far-blown fumes of this war obscure everything I wish to see, give a false color to every figure, an unnatural flavor to every experience, a strident dissonance to every tune of life?

Or will the war-jangled nerves of this spectator group, listening, watching, appealing, protesting, brooding, scoffing, leering, praying, more completely betray the bitter truth about men and women? Has war torn away the smug mask of civilization—even here so far from the horror itself?

Is there to be a "show-down" for all humanity?

One thing is certain. I do not know this by any rational comparisons with group-men of the past, yet it is possible to see the inherent sign. The thing that is certain is a heightened temperature, a touch of fever that I am sure is tinging even the simplest phases of life.

I am sure I will not get an impression of group-men as they used to be.

Perhaps nowhere will any one ever again see any sort of men quite as they used to be.

The war has burned some of the world. Much of the world it has singed. All of the world is feeling its hot breath.

So that I am seeing that impossible thing, a suspended moment between past and future.

I am seeing a doped world. . . .

And yet, it may be that under the spell of this awful drug, this tincture of fire subtly stealing through the veins of the living world, men will see visions . . . visions that will not only broadly affect all that they may do hereafter, all that they may be hereafter, but that will in amazing detail of influence transfigure their sense of history, their ideas of destiny, their apprehensions of desire.

#### IV

Rudley has been brooding over the airplanes at Mineola. He has asked me to go with him to see the work of the airmen. Perhaps I should go. It would be a thrilling thing to visualize the anatomy of these sky dragons.

He asked me in the presence of Sarah on the evening of his dinner call. Perhaps he had some intention of inciting her to join us in the excursion—a chilly business at this season.

Sarah's look had a wish in it.

There was something luminously graphic about Rudley's description of the planes. When he made the motion of curve with his hands to indicate the moment of leaving the ground his eyes had a fanatical gleam. He is bitten hard by this thing. He has all the patter about the different types, the engines, the systems of control, the variations between the German and French

and British makes, and the great things Americans are doing.

Above all he is eloquent in the matter of engines. The room seemed to grow very large, its ceiling seemed to melt away, when he used the word "climbing."

Climbing . . . climbing. One dwindles in the great spaces that open to the word.

I can't quite imagine the detail of an engine.

Somehow Sarah managed to give Rudley the impression of understanding what he meant when he said "reciprocating," and made a plunging motion with his fists. And when he emphasized the advantage of a rotary action "that wouldn't shake the liver out of a plane" she was looking squarely and eagerly into his eyes.

"You mean," she said, "that it would be smooth instead of shivery."

"Exactly."

"Without the waste of power where the—the piston thing—swings over—at the bottom and top."

"Precisely! A true rotary is *all* push—pushing every instant—with no rack to it at all. Just power—all used."

"I see," said Sarah.

Rudley blazed with appreciation of her understanding—or was it just her lucky way of seeming to understand? I can't quite believe she really could have a glimmering of anything so intricate. She has such an excluding attitude toward complicated things.

I remember my father laboriously analyzing for her the idea of the Trinity. She wouldn't have it.

"Maybe it isn't nice of me," she said, "but I never could be bothered with anything so complicated."

And here she was pretending to see the difference between a reciprocating and a rotary engine!

One result of the engine talk was that we all trooped into Rudley's apartment—my aunt in the procession, to see the thing he had been talking about.

"It's an old story to Anson," said Rudley, on the way. "He's conservative about admitting its points. But I suspect him of believing that it may actually do something."

I was ready enough to believe, I told him, but comprehension was another affair.

That made an odd picture—the group of us in the narrow room, with the littered work-bench and the little engine shining and humming. Rudley explained and pointed out, and illustrated by means of blue-print diagrams, the details of his invention. I had thought him enthusiastic when I was the sole auditor and spectator. Now the real passion showed.

Sarah, I have no doubt, was responsible. She followed every point with that preternatural nimbleness so characteristic of her heightened moments. She alights on an idea in the manner of a winged creature; not with the irregular approach of a butterfly, but with the clean-circling precision of a sure-winged and sure-footed bird. She may find only the extremity of a branch, but she alights crisply and confidently.

Sarah was Rudley's audience when the exposition drew close to the subtleties of the contrivance that is to revolutionize the air game. My aunt and I occupied the background of the strange scene, she, I suspect, as much as myself, studying the two rather than the engine.

Yet it was my aunt who asked the astonishingly acute question, "How about the weight per horse-power?"

"Just half," announced Rudley, as he swung sharply to his questioner. "Just half in comparison with the average of the present engines—that's the way I figure it out. And you know what that must mean."

Sarah was permitted to hold the piece of wood against the driving-rod.

"Press hard!" urged Rudley, his face shining in pride of the power.



Sarah in quite evident elation pressed hard, the engine humming on.

She must have been less dexterous than usual, for the wood slid from the end of the whirring rod and she uttered a little exclamation.

There was blood on one of her fingers.

Rudley's remorse was a painful thing to see. He caught hold of that scratched hand as if to deny the injury the right to be.

"Too bad! I'm awfully sorry! I never thought—"

"It's nothing," said Sarah, dabbing at the scratch with her handkerchief and turning a smiling face to him.

"What a beastly shame—my engine—to hurt you!" It was as if he accentuated the "you."

He shut off the current. As the machine stopped I saw him stare at the end of the little shaft. There was a faint stain at the edge.

"You have made a blood covenant with it," he said, in almost an awed voice. He joined my aunt in an inspection of the injury, expressed his chagrin that he had smashed the bottle holding the last of his peroxide, and was for going out at once to get some . . . unless my aunt—had she any?

I slipped away to our drug-cupboard and the formula of repair was soon happily finished.

"I'm always doing it myself," laughed Rudley, with uneasy eyes upon Sarah.

We sat for a while in Rudley's parlor. Sarah's interested glance elicited more than any earlier curiosity of mine. The woman with the wonderful eyes was Rudley's mother. The saddle had been bought from a young Nevada sheriff to whom a grateful bunch of citizens had presented a gorgeous new affair. The tall clock belonged to Zorn. It was a good clock, too, but in common with other clocks it needed to be wound, which brought up extraordinary difficulties. Rudley was convinced that

the faculty for remembering to wind a clock, especially a clock with weights, was a rare, perhaps a superior, gift. Zorn seemed to feel that, no matter what you did, the weights were always at the bottom. Rudley never found himself thinking strongly about the clock until he had noticed a great many times that it was twenty minutes to five. Stokes had promised to devote himself to it. He wound it every evening, with ostentatious precision, for four days, though once a week would have been enough. Evidently he had exhausted his devotion in these first paroxysms. Anyway, the clock had been silent for a long time.

The cabinet, too, belonged to Zorn. It had a history, rather sad by all that Rudley knew, with something about a Florentine woman of wonderful beauty whose face had been disfigured—a frightful diagonal mark—by a jealous beast with whom she had run away to America. . . . It was a pity Zorn was not there to tell the story—to tell how the thing came to him.

There were objects belonging to Rudley that were placed before Sarah and my aunt, among them a curious cane with a head of exquisitely carved ivory, showing a running horse, presented to Rudley by “a wonderful woman”—the daughter of a mine operator; a queer bit of gold quartz; Indian work; photographs of Nome, Monterey, Lake Louise, several famous bridges, and the most interesting engineering stunt he ever had the luck to have a hand in, at Chicago. There were, too, certain flash-light pictures taken in the bowels of New York. . . .

I could not fix my mind on these things. The great thing, the overshadowing thing—Sarah and Rudley—filled these moments with an absurdly excluding importance, as of something impending.

Which I suppose would be the attitude of mind of a nice, utterly formulated, somewhat rabbinical, male old maid.

How much of this feeling belongs to the situation without regard to the man?

Is my aunt playing a game?

Does Sarah see what is happening—to herself as well as to Rudley?

## V

Sarah is to go with us to see the fliers at Mineola.

Meanwhile mother's edict is that we spend Christmas at Naugaway. Her letter betrays certain curiosities.

"You and Sarah [she says] have not been especially generous in letters, and to tell the truth, I am not always clear as to what you are doing. You two went away in such an expectant state of mind, and (in your case at least) with such devoted intentions, that you must forgive me for wondering at times just what road you are traveling. Everything sounds so dreadfully experimental. I suppose I ought to remember that it is all experimental. I am not surprised to hear that you haven't gone far with the book. Perhaps I don't need to remind you, my dear, that books are like babies. There must be a long gestation. Permit the prospective grandmother of a book to administer this sage caution. I have told you that I once started to write a book (about wild-flowers)—but you came along instead. And then Sarah—*my collected works, in two volumes.*"

(One volume wretchedly bound!)

"I don't know much about New York. But I know something of its state of mind. That knowledge is to be had, you know, from a few examples as well as from a few visits. It is not altogether a pleasant state of mind—to the outsider; mostly, I think, because it seems so largely a state of uneasiness. You tell me—every one mentions it, and has been mentioning it for as long as I can remember—that the city is frightfully ripped up. This always seems to be its mental condition also. Perhaps a city couldn't afford to sit back and be comfortable.

Yet it is tiresome—as with certain women—to have New York always talking about its operations. I hope you won't let the *clutter* of the city, the physical side of it, impede your way to the thing you have gone after. You say 'men in the mass.' I suppose they all are men just the same. We shall talk over these things. Though not too much. I want to get you away from city thinking for a few days."

There is one passage in the letter that promises a definite topic of discussion at home, however delicate the topic may turn out to be.

"You must know," she remarks, rather abruptly, "that young Rudley is not very well spoken of here. On the contrary. It may not mean anything very damaging that he broke with his father. That old pirate is not much of an asset to a boy, for all his money. But I seem to have heard that young Rudley went the pace. In your study of men, my dear, please include your neighbor."

Thus to be admonished at a time when I was feeling a bit guilty over too much study of my neighbor has left my emotions in a tangle.

Actually to study any one for a utilitarian purpose, even for a protective purpose, would always appear to me as too mandatory, too artificial, to be comfortable. I have no Sherlock Holmes instinct. I could leap at his throat and throttle him to a confession of anything he ought to confess. But as for climbing the fence of his personality and peeping through the back windows of his soul—no, I can't and won't do it.

## VI

It was just as well, perhaps, that a sharply divergent incident should carry me away from certain thoughts—even if the substituted image was a punch-bowl.

A punch-bowl. That is what stands out, though there was plenty else.

I think it was green.

It was on a wabby table. The liquid within was reddish—naturally. Any one might have tried it. There was nothing sinister or insistent about the way it tasted. It had a kindly taste, a sort of well-bred kindliness, though more, I suppose, like a perfect gentleman than a perfect lady.

Circumstances led to my trying three cups—or perhaps it was four. Glass cups, of moderate size.

My first impression was simply of pleasant refreshment. It was on the following morning that I felt disturbed—absurdly disturbed. I have written nothing in the days between.

Though this sort of thing has happened millions of times and has been discussed millions of times—possibly nothing could be more ludicrous than to mention it at all—it was a new experience (I mean the punch-bowl—the day after) and has given me a fresh and intensely vivid sense of man's sharp variation from other animals.

Nothing kindles platitudes in a man like something wrong with his insides. . . .

In a little while there will be no more punch-bowls, except as shelf ornaments along with snuff-boxes, crowns, nose-rings, opium-pipes, handcuffs, hat-pins, medicine-bottles, and other symbols of historic tastes, passions, and infirmities.

There will be an interval in which some one will have opportunity to invent another spiritual test of equivalent portability and potency. But the thing that gives significance to punch-bowls seems likely to pass.

A man who sat next to the wabby table made this statement oracularly.

"The white shadow of Prohibition steals across the map," he said. "Russia has shut out vodka. France has forsworn her insidious absinthe. England turns her ruddy face from brandy. And a fearful virtue has affected the United States like a seizure. Let us, then,"

and he looked about the room, "drink to our departing friend! A swashbuckling chap at times, often egregious and effusive, sometimes subtly cynical like a peevish poet, full of noble contradictions as befits distilled temperament; cajoling and cantankerous, romantic, analytical, illuminating; reddening with a lusty love of life, or paling in the white heat of large desires; waving his wizard wand to the leveling of obstacles, the suffusion of pallid purposes, the garnishing of bodily beauty with gems ineffable, the exalting of every image in the shambling spectacle of life. I drink to our departing friend!"

He drank solemnly and simply, quite in the spirit of a remark he had made to me a few moments before.

"My young friend," he said, "do not confuse this with gastric gratification. Merely physical functions are concerned with needs or repletions. You say, 'I have just had some.' That is not the point. Each drink has its own entirely independent considerations. A drink like this is not a mere physical function. It is a ritual."

. . . Sarah and I went together to the quaint place where this happened, with no thought of punch-bowls; in fact, with no predispositions whatever.

The fact that Laura Sherrick made the plea for our going gave the only hint I had as to the character of the incident. As a hint I found it meaningless. Sarah may have accomplished a better guess.

We didn't go into that after I had inquired, "What sort of thing is this to be?"

And Sarah had made answer, "A meeting at a poet's place."

This sounded like dabbling, and God knows this is no time for dabbling. . . .

The poet was Lawrence Pine. He looks like a poet, which was a great shock, for the artistic class has stopped looking artistic as a habit. I don't mean that he is altogether the poet of tradition, yet his black hair has rather a romantic wave in it, and his deep eyes, wide

and large, have too sharp a glint when his face lights up. He is big-boned, with a kind of neurasthenic radiance that is likely to make one either sympathetic or uneasy.

Pine himself opened the door when we had climbed four flights of steps in a musty building facing the fire-escapes at the back-street end of an old department store.

Evidently Laura Sherrick had been watching, for she was at Pine's elbow in a moment, introducing us out of our embarrassment—so far as it is possible to escape embarrassment on emerging through a single door into the midst of things.

The square room in which we found ourselves was comparatively bare as to wall spaces—ostentatiously so, one would say. There were, indeed, some deep-colored prints tacked upon the painted plaster. A high open case of shelves of a gray-green color filled the middle of one space. The shelves bulged with books, many of them with foreign-looking paper covers. There were a davenport partly covered by a tattered but beautifully embroidered silken robe; a couch doing service as a divan; and a venerable-looking piano. The wobbly table stood near a door leading to a smaller room beyond, which betrayed some of the features of a kitchenette. It was upon a round black table in a corner, littered with books and papers, that Pine heaped all outdoor garments, excepting only hats, which were perched in a rack bridging the space above.

"Perhaps I ought to have piloted you," said Miss Sherrick, while Pine was again flinging open the door to other comers. "But evidently my directions were effective. You look wonderfully well, Sarah!"

We were introduced to a Mrs. Benderson, a wiry, flushed little woman wearing horn-rimmed glasses, and a Mr. Jorell, a nervous person with large teeth shining under one of those tooth-brush mustaches.

The new-comers were a big, jovial man introduced

as Bruno Fischer, and a Miss Latch, a girl with startling eyebrows who wore a yellow robe such as I have associated with mandarins and clairvoyants, and who is, after all, only a rich person with collections.

Pine asked Miss Latch, "Is Baby coming?"

"If she can dig Bud out," replied Miss Latch from the cloak corner.

Pine laughed. "How Bud does hate to move after dinner!"

He turned to those of us who occupied the davenport. "If they ever put *this* country on a diet, something might be done. Why is it that food should brighten women and send men into a stupor?"

"I should object to your diet if that would make it the other way about," declared Miss Latch, adjusting herself in a sort of steamer chair that flanked the piano. Then she suddenly sat forward.

"I believe that's Baby coming now."

A heavy footfall sounded beyond the door.

Pine greeted with an intimate friendliness a woman somewhat in my aunt Portia's style of architecture, an immense, Brunhild sort of woman, wearing a gorgeously beaded white gown, and a wrap of scarlet edged with black fur. Very carefully arranged tendrils of golden hair shone under the sweep of a tumultuous black hat.

"So good of you to come, Baby!" cried Mr. Jorell, his bristles quivering cordially.

Baby, who had an elaborately prepared, somewhat masculine face, and who was breathing heavily from the four flights, glanced as if rather preferring the davenport—the corner seat, to be exact—and I removed myself to make her choice possible. If I had offered myself as a footstool, had pushed out the side wall, or had placed the piano on end, I'm sure she would have taken the matter for granted in quite the same way.

She is a Mrs. Kennis. Her entrance made the coming of Mr. Kennis seem quite incidental, though Mr. Kennis



is an important-looking person, if somewhat fragile, and having the effect of being acutely shaved and over-trained.

"Bud," said Pine to Mr. Kennis, "I know this is a sacrifice—"

"You're damned right," said Mr. Kennis, pulling off his gloves.

"But man does not live by leather alone—"

"You might have a little sleep on the coats," suggested Miss Latch, gleefully.

Mr. Kennis, returning from the coat corner, ignored this to glance about the room, rubbing his hands peremptorily.

"Well," he said, "what is it to be?"

I had quite the same curiosity.

Pine was about to answer when two more figures appeared in the door; one a brawny, sun-browned lad with noticeable blue eyes and an awkward manner, made known as Mr. Hugh McGarry; the other a man who looked like a convivial Cæsar as a convivial Cæsar might have looked in a tweed suit. His name is Aaron Stein. It was quite by chance that he found an inadequate chair beside the little table on which the punch-bowl was afterward deposited. I have quoted a segment of his remarks in that neighborhood.

By this time the conversation, as the saying is, had become general, and, in the total, rather loud. The rich Miss Latch was particularly shrill, and a rumble that was more to be felt than heard came from Fischer.

Nevertheless, Pine was able to produce silence by bringing his hands together.

Thus began a strange two hours. Strange because, though it was simply an "evening," it jumbled sentiment and plain speech in a way that was new to me.

Pine struck the note by saying, in his rather gentle yet penetrating voice, "One little point as a prelude: We shall say nothing to-night about the war—"

"Out of deference to Fischer?" asked Stein.

"Out of deference to Decency in the presence of the Unspeakable."

"You're beginning it yourself," declared Stein, with a chuckle.

"No. Nothing more shall be said. I shall see to that."

Stein was not so easily checked. "Behold!" he exclaimed, in a stage whisper, "an Anarchist laying down law!"

Pine frankly joined the laugh. "Anarchism," observed Pine, "is the pursuit of beauty, not of ugliness. So that if I am permitted to determine the path of this excursion we shall keep close to clean, strong, honest things. Music, though it is not always clean, nor strong, nor honest, is an effort toward beauty, so that I think we shall do right in having a musical cocktail at the start-off. This announcement will cause anxiety to Bud Kennis and incite unspoken rebellion in the breast of Aaron Stein—"

Kennis, who with the connivance of a sofa pillow was seated on the floor against the wall, had indeed emitted a sleepy sigh.

"—two gentlemen of active rather than original minds, and original rather than active bodies. But this is a heterogeneous world. You have not been brought here for forcible mental feeding, and attention, even that of Bud Kennis and Aaron Stein, shall be rewarded. I am going to read a poem—"

"Of course," said Stein.

"—despite any possible interruptions. After certain other good things you shall have some punch."

"At just what hour?" murmured Kennis.

"At the psychological moment. I meant to have wafers with it. But perhaps you have been broke yourselves."

"I'll go out and stake you to some," said Kennis, "while you're reading the poem."

"Silence!" commanded Pine. "Mrs. Benderson is going to play. . . ."

The performances of the evening I should have regarded as unimportant save for the significance I found in the subject of Pine's poem. . . .

To be sure, the incidents were sometimes striking—as when Baby Kennis recited, with a heaving intensity, a tender piece of Strindberg. And there was something theatrical in Pine's casual introduction of young Hugh McGarry as "by affection a singer and by profession a hod-carrier." It appears that the lad really is a hod-carrier—though Fischer, who knows impresarios, says he is "going to change all that." (Pine, I understand, was reading a manuscript in the street when he stumbled over some building material. McGarry picked him up. They would have exchanged cards if McGarry had been provided. At all events, Pine invited him to his place for that evening and made the discovery by which we were duly thrilled at this later time. I never have heard a more wonderful voice.)

Pine's poem was called "The Desire of Love."

His reading began in an eager half-voice that grew more intense and then strident as he went on.

It is hard to judge words when we have the feeling that formed them too vividly before us.

He made Love seem to be the beginning and the end. He began with protoplasm and ended with chiffon. He made Love a flame lighting the gloom of a crawling world, the guiding-star of a groping civilization, a jewel, gorgeous beyond the composite glory of all imaginable gems of the earth, blazing on the bosom of Life. At its touch dead things breathed and leaped. It dissolved the granite of Greed. To the eye of Genius it was microscope and telescope. To Labor it handed a sword. To Force it handed a flower. It laughed in the bubbles of wine, sang in the bare nerves of a violin, put pulse under shining shoulders of marble, suffused with an ultimate

color and drenched with the supreme perfume the flesh and tendrils of Being.

He was, of course, talking about Passion, which he first revealed in a drapery of glittering words, then put forward in a naked splendor. . . .

There was one passage, in the first person, describing a scene with his love . . . circumstantially. There was much about her beautiful body.

Poetic license is a wonderful thing. The speech of a perfect gentleman may wander anywhere . . . if it has *feet*. A man who in daily contact is quite accustomed to recognize those reservations which belong to even an animal modesty can, if he appears as a poet, stand up—in a drawing-room, for that matter—undress his mind, strip every vestige of covering from the most personal and private emotions . . .

If we imagine in print such far-flung images of experience, how should we expect the profane outsider to feel at seeing a girl like Laura Sherrick, for example, at dinner with Pine? I find myself wondering whether a certain kind of poet thinks of such a matter. . . .

Yet Pine's poem had sincerity—or let us say, sincerities—and more than a tinkle of beauty.

There was a line that I should like to steal for a text in the Book. It occurred in this way:

—with lips  
Fused in the flame of love, to find  
At last!—at last!—that answer there,  
That garden of the Golden Wish.

The garden of the Golden Wish! . . .

## VII

"This punch," said Stein, surveying those of us who seemed free to listen, "is the only really intelligent thing that has happened here to-night. Personally I am

averse to alcohol, but this at least has a meaning, whereas—”

“Stein and punch-bowl,” murmured Jorell, submitting cups to Baby Kennis and Mrs. Benderson.

“Jorell,” continued Stein, “has the sort of mind that can think of a thing like that without injuring itself. Jorell is essentially a mixture of persiflage and camouflage. Witness his momentary occupation! You will remember—if not, you may refer to Pine, who has consented to spare from destruction any classic with a naughty woman in it—that it was Ganem, that ‘slave of love,’ who, having offended the caliph and being condemned to death, escaped in the disguise of a waiter.”

I liked Stein; and McGarry had the ring of true metal. I wish I could see him carrying a hod. It would give the mind an earth contact, a grip on real things. . . .

I was staring at the boy’s face as he stood between Miss Latch and Baby Kennis when Laura Sherrick touched my arm.

“These people,” she said, “don’t matter. They are just people. It is Pine who counts. I wanted you to know him.”

My impulse was to say, “You mean that you wanted Sarah to know him,” for it was to Sarah that he was talking at this moment.

But I said only, “*Does* he count?”

“He is one of the few honest men I know.”

“An honest Anarchist.”

“Yes.”

“In the matter of being honest and being right—”

“Only honest people are right.”

We were looking squarely at each other now.

“Is that the beginning of Anarchism?” I asked.

“It is the beginning of everything—everything worth while.”

“Are you honest?”

“Not yet. I’m coming to it—I hope.”

"When you come to it will you be an Anarchist?"

"Not necessarily. But I shall be right."

When I turned my eyes from her for a moment she said, "I know what you're thinking—that it must be very comfortable to be so sure."

"No," I said. "I wasn't thinking that. I was thinking of the awful mess of a lot of people each being honest—and each confident of being right."

"You're imagining something that hasn't happened yet," she declared. "It isn't the honest who make the mess. It's the big admixture of the dishonest—and the imperfectly honest."

"Like us?" I suggested.

"Like us."

She dropped into a brass dish the fragment of a cigarette. I felt as if she had dropped the subject. Anyway, when she turned to me again she said, abruptly:

"You don't like to see me smoking, do you?"

"No," I said. But this was not what I was thinking. I was wondering whether she thought it honest to know Rudley and to have concealed the fact.

"It is the New England side of you," she asserted, conclusively. "It sticks."

"What became of the New England side of you?" I asked.

"I guess I still have it. But I don't believe it is the same side. You know," she went on, flecking at a fold of the long amber-colored one-piece thing she wore, "you have the makings of a militant monk."

"I don't know about militant monks," I said. "I suppose you mean something acidulous and fanatical."

She shook her head. "No. Not exactly that. I think you have a correcting instinct—"

"Because I don't happen to adore to see you smoking."

"Because that is so much *like* you."

"You have explained," I said, "one reason why men

are imperfectly honest. You ask me if I like to see you smoking. I say, 'No.' Then you call me a militant monk."

"Oh, not yet!" she protested. "Only the makings. I have the makings of a . . ."

She halted sharply. "What's the use?" she said, after the pause. "We lie a lot to one another, don't we? Maybe it's just because we're all restless."

"What do you *want*?" I asked her.

"Want?" She showed her amazingly white teeth. "Want? I suppose if I knew I should go and get it—unless it was something we can't go after—"

"Such as—"

"Such as those beginning things—beginning things that can't be put back." Her eyes wandered and the noise of the talk swirled around us. A hardness crept into the lines of her face.

"Look at these people. How do you suppose they would answer that funny question of yours? Don't you suppose the thing that many of them want most is something they have lost?"

"Let us take McGarry," I urged—for this was all a bit solemn. "He has found something. He wants to sing—above everything. You can see it radiating from him."

"Yes," she said. "I envy McGarry. I envy people who know what they want and can at least *see* it. And I guess I envy you—not that New England side, of course—but you know what you want to do. You know. And you are doing it. Isn't that so?"

I admitted that it was so—even if it was foolish.

She laughed. "Earnestly foolish? I'm sure it would be that way! But you need more than that, Mr. Professor. You must manage to make a complete fool of yourself somehow—and find out that you have done it. That will do you a lot of good. It will loosen you up."

"What would you suggest?"

"Well, *that's* foolish enough to be a good start. When

you make a fool of yourself—the necessary out-and-out kind—it won't be on a prescription. I might, though, for a small experiment, suggest that you ask me to have some punch." . . .

She repeated this to Sarah when we three had gone away together. "And it's foolish for you two to go out of your way to see me home. I don't like being toted."

"But suppose," I said, "that we had no kindly intentions at all? Suppose we simply turned in here to finish the conversation?"

"Still quibbling!" she flung out at the door.

### VIII

The night air grew sharp as we continued our walk toward home. Sarah gripped my arm with a little shiver.

I waited for a word about Pine, a direct word, or one round about. Instead she remarked:

"To-morrow we go to see the fliers."

She looked up at the panel of stars.

"It will be cold," I said. "Better wear something thick."

"Thick" amused Sarah. "Everything thick isn't warm," she informed me.

"Neither is everything thin," I retorted, "such as women are so fond of wearing."

"I don't expect to fly. They say it is frightfully cold when you go away up."

"And when you're whizzing."

She was silent for a space.

"I suppose," she said then, "it would make a difference who was—driving. . . ."

"As to how warm you would be?"

"No! no!—as to how safe you would feel."

"I see," I said. "Your thoughts are flying. I fancied that maybe you would be thinking about that—party."

"Funny, wasn't it?"



"Rather."

She spoke of Miss Latch, and Hugo Fischer and McGarry's "Mother Machree," and something droll Laura Sherrick had said about Sir Orville Panning, apropos his speech at the Midnight Club. Never a word about Pine.

The simple thing would have been to ask her what she thought about him. She would have given some sort of an answer. There are people who are quite content with answers because they count them as opinions. They run about with interrogatory siphons sucking expressions out of other people. Mostly they are people who say, "Oh, do you think so?"

Very likely there is a good deal that is absurd in family reticences, in reticences between friends. So many married people show this trait that one must conclude that it sprouts naturally in the soil of propinquity. One learns to take what one can get and to make the most of one's own shutters.

Of course the brotherly relation is extremely delicate, unless the sister is wholly plastic. Sarah is in no sense plastic. She has devised a theory that I am interested in molding her opinions. Even if she were plastic this theory would make trouble.

And so I watch my step in the vicinity of her reserve, paying the penalty of our closeness.

Moreover, there is good science in this practice. If she said nothing about Pine it was probably because she didn't know what she thought about him. As a matter of fact, I didn't know what I thought about him. I had a feeling. If I had been accosted in the matter I might have talked myself into an opinion. Certainly I didn't have one ready. . . .

It was not until the next morning when we were with Rudley on the train to Mineola, and when I had begun to have unpleasant thoughts about the punch-bowl, that she came to Pine.

"Last night," I heard her saying to Rudley, "I met a poet who hates inventions. Isn't that odd?"

"An old man, then?"

"Oh no! Quite youngish. About twenty-eight."

Rudley grinned. "Then he doesn't use a penknife to sharpen his quill—or maybe he only hates new inventions. There are lots of people like that. Still living in caves."

"Yes, I think it is mostly new inventions. He thinks we're all getting to be too complicated."

"Perhaps he's right. Anyway, no one, thank Heaven, will need to invent another engine!"

Pine was dismissed by their laugh.

Rudley and Sarah sat before me on the subterranean train. We had reached the hole in the ground through the stately temple, and were whisked under a city and a river, across bleak suburbs and over stretches of Long Island strangely patched with fragments of sliced-up farms alternating with prophetic thrustings of the city.

I'm sure I shall always associate Mineola with shivers and a looking-up crick in the neck; with dampish ground, a staring, milky blue sky, and an opalescent sun. A keen, cold sweep of wind said plainly enough that it was not technically a flying day.

Something else in the air, a tingle of far-sent feeling as to the great game, might easily have seemed to affect every figure in this ultra-modern stage-setting.

There was, indeed, no outward mark of excitement. The mechanicians might even have produced the effect of a tranquil preoccupation, oiling, tapping, fingering bracing cables as a musician might the string of a 'cello, testing struts or fins or stabilizers or strangely articulated ailerons. Yet a tensivity as definite as that of an inter-plane bracing wire came to me in the deliberate movements of crews and pilots.

A fantastic bit of action was the bobbing of an unsuspected head from a cockpit, perhaps to be followed by

another, telling of huddled conference or co-operation in the thorax of a silent machine.

Rudley and the young lieutenant he seemed to know very well talked of propellers—why they were of wood, why they could be longer in the blade when the power was greater, and why you must never by any chance be absent-minded when you are near one, no matter whether it is the stillest-looking thing in sight.

The lieutenant pointed toward a machine in one of the hangars. There had been a call, a head appeared above the cockpit, and a mighty roar—the newest voice in the chorus of evolution—synchronized with the sudden melting of the blades into a blurred circle.

“If any part of a man were near enough . . .” suggested Rudley.

“ . . . clean as a guillotine,” said the lieutenant. “Last week a man’s arm . . . at the shoulder.”

The look in Sarah’s face put an end to that.

We grew accustomed to these practice trills of the great voice, beginning with a guttural shudder and ending like a lion heard through a megaphone, before seeing one of the dragons start over the field, and before experiencing that easing of the sound in the spaces of the sky.

Surely it will be long before the flight of an airplane becomes commonplace, before we shall take quite for granted the splendor of this physical fact. That rush across the level, like the sprint of a man for the broad jump, is itself something to make the breath come quicker, a kind of frenzied question that holds like pressure on a nerve until the slanting rise relaxes the tension.

All sorts of images flare in one’s mind as the thing cuts into the sky. At the start the silhouette seemed like an arrow—more like an arrow than like a bird—an arrow strangely barbed, a gigantic, living arrow, growling raucously on its way to some far objective.

High overhead it was not like an arrow. It was a falcon or an eagle . . . soaring and watching as in some absorbed pause.

In no way did it suggest battle. Yet if one went back to the falcon or the eagle the quarry thought would come at last.

What *would* a bird think of it?

I asked the lieutenant. "They don't like it," he said. "Afraid. Except the eagle. He doesn't understand how to be afraid. He is known to have attacked it. A surprise for him, eh?"

One could fancy that, certainly. What a tremendous event in the life of an eagle—to pounce on this amazing, insolent interloper of the sky . . . and find all that he would find!

Imagine the eagle's rival, with its stiff wings and awful voice, growing from a speck to a monster as it does when it leaps at you in that tearing return across the field, halting with a roar but a few yards away!

The big moment for Sarah was when Rudley and the lieutenant helped her to the rim of a cockpit and pointed out the altimeter, the compass, pressure-gauges, inclinometer, oil-pulsators, switches, magnetos—yes, and the handy fire-grenade. I fancy that it may have seemed to them as rather decent not to say too much about the full meaning of *that*.

As for Rudley, he had his big moment when he stood with Sarah in the actual presence of a "Curtis twelve" engine and could once more expound his engine story. Deep water for Sarah. This matter of "understanding" a man so well has its penalties. Rudley's elation was transparently complete. He was aflame with enthusiasm. The glow of him was reflected in Sarah's face. Any man would have liked to see that.

To be the mirror to a man's great wish—that is a potent thing in a woman. I suppose it explains many a mighty piece of history. I'm not thinking merely of the

Josephines and Lady Hamiltons and George Sands, but of the women close beside the pioneers—beside the lonesome fighters and explorers and experimenters and artists of the world—well, maybe you would say the great gamblers. . . .

When I saw Rudley, one hand touching Sarah's arm while he pointed at the humming silhouette against the gray sky, I wondered again whether his engine dream wasn't giving him the gambler's thrill . . . and whether there isn't something in that to infect the imagination of a girl like Sarah—a girl with imagination enough in the first place to grasp an image and get its bearings—whether something of the gambler's thrill would not quite naturally begin to be a factor with her, an absolutely enveloping factor, perhaps, and one that would cast upon Rudley the glamour of the most stupendous adventure ever inspired by the conquering curiosity of mankind.

If Rudley had been a trained pilot, and had been privileged to ask her to fly with him, she would, of course, have been eager to go. There was a moment when I thought the lieutenant meditated an invitation. He looked at Sarah with a frank admiration. But it was not a good flying day. Though I had keyed myself to such an incident, I was glad it did not happen. If the chance had come I might have climbed aboard one of the things myself without a qualm. I suppose only a weakling could shrink from such a superlative sensation. Despatching Sarah would have been another affair.

We had luncheon in a little hotel in company with the lieutenant and his sister. It was soon after the sister appeared that the question of eating came to be considered. I felt cold, and was glad of the coffee.

Miss Gerridge has "been up." She described all of her sensations. Miss Gerridge described everything she happened to think of, including the kind of cream you should put on your nose before going into the open air.

Her talk was incessant and penetrating. Even food did not interrupt it. Although the roar of an engine forces a pilot and his passenger to be content with gestures, I'm sure that Miss Gerridge talked for the whole of her flight.

She talked to me on the way back to the field—about her brother, and what her mother said when he got his commission; about a wonderful colonel she met last week, and the *funniest* thing he said about his sister-in-law's way of driving a car; about Noo Yawk, and George Cohan, and sweaters, and appendicitis, and Red Cross bridge, and Welsh rabbit, and jazz bands—she was very strong on jazz bands. I asked her what a jazz band was.

"Oh! Haven't you heard one?" she exclaimed, in eager appreciation of my ignorance. "They're just bands with funny instruments—with a sort of queer, nice sound that makes you laugh. There's a funny sound in them somewhere like when you have a piece of paper wrapped over a comb—a perfectly lovely, wheezy sound. You know what I mean?"

We might have gone farther into jazz bands if there hadn't been a spatter of rain, which naturally turned Miss Gerridge to atmospheric topics. . . .

Because we waited to watch the finish of a practice flight we were in a somewhat damp condition before returning to the station. My impression is that this fact rather confirmed Sarah in a feeling that she had had an adventure.

It was while we awaited the train that Rudley remarked to Sarah, with a gesture toward the scene we had left:

"This would be very annoying to your poet friend."

"And yet it would make a great poem," said Sarah.

"A poem?" Rudley evidently hadn't thought of it that way. "Perhaps." He was in a mood, I am sure, to wish to see the poem opportunity if Sarah thought it

was there. (If I had been in his place I know what I should have said. It is easy to think of wit for the other man. I'm sure I should never say the right thing to a girl . . . at the right time.)

What he did say was, "I don't quite get poems and patents in the same class."

If we hadn't been so wet there might have been an argument. Moreover, the train came. Yet I saw them across a rather full car talking animatedly during the run back to the city. It must have been during this interval that they plotted going to see a play with an aviator in it. My aunt was asked to join them. I've forgotten her form of evasion.

Rudley has a way of carrying off things. When the invitation came to me to "make it three" I was obliged to plead an engagement, very much to my liking, to join a circle at a fraternity club in the Roaring Forties.

"It's horribly embarrassing," said Rudley, "the way Sarah Grayl and I are forced to wander off alone to a show. Really, I'm quite annoyed."

"So I see," said my aunt.

## IX

Looking back on the thing that has happened, I can perceive not only how inevitable it was—inevitableness, after the event, is the smoothest of conclusions—but how the contributory elements worked together with a kind of malicious nicety to give the thrust a sharpness.

It was but a little after ten o'clock when I came back from the club, and I had in mind to take a quiet hour for the Book. The way in which street noises diminish in number and volume toward midnight is like that of a slowly subsiding ache, and though this gives to those that remain a clearness out of proportion to their actual quality as noises, one gets the stilling effect gratefully. That shuttle of sound from the

elevated road in the middle distance weaves itself into a pattern as dull and aloof as that made by the ticking of a clock. The brass treble of the trolley-bell becomes a mechanical punctuation point in the gray page of the night. An auto-horn splashes into the pianissimo of the orchestration like the unctuous yawp of an old frog. Some one up-stairs drops a shoe or moves a chair. Alonzo puts an unnecessary snap into the closing of his elevator cage. A man in dirty white produces a rhythmic muffled screech with his street brush. A cat wails, or a dog's belated outing brings an experimental yelp of salute. But it is night. And windows are a soft pedal. There would be a difference in summer.

It chanced that I found Zorn with me in Alonzo's cage. He didn't ask me to visit him. He has his own way of making a suggestion of that sort. This time it seemed to be accomplished by his beginning to talk and unlocking his door without pausing. To get the end of it I had to follow him in.

Stokes, with his hat in his hand, as if by recent arrival, came to the door of the passage inquiringly.

"I've put an immediate letter on your table, sir."

"Stokes," said Zorn, with a savage turn of the head, "I have told you repeatedly that I don't want you to 'sir' me."

"Yes, sir."

"That term belongs to a flummery that is obsolete and repulsive. It gives me a nausea. You understand that I don't like it, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, then. At whatever inconvenience, at whatever cost to your personal impulses and preferences, I wish you would make an effort to omit the word."

"All the same, Mr. Zorn, I was once with a 'igh-class Southern family—it was in Louisville, Mr. Zorn—and the gentlemen thereabouts often said 'sir' to one another."



"It was their privilege," snapped Zorn. "And you will permit me, Stokes, to remind you that you are not a Southern gentleman."

"Right-o," murmured Stokes.

After turning about, the man once more faced his critic.

"I think I am going to Canada to enlist, s—Mr. Zorn."

Zorn regarded him steadily for a moment. "To enlist?"

Stokes nodded in something like an attitude of attention. "I met an old pal of mine. . . . He's going."

Zorn mutely revolved the case in his mind. A whimsical corollary seemed to occur to him.

"And so you will be saying 'sir' again in spite of me."

Stokes grasped this slowly but accurately.

"Why, I fancy that's true, sir!"

There was another pause while Stokes waited as if to be assured that he had been dismissed.

"I don't know what sort of a soldier you will make," said Zorn, gruffly. "I suppose you could cook for them."

Stokes's eyebrows twitched. "I can't say. A chap can't be sure. But I was thinkin' I might do rather well as a fightin'-man. . . . The fact is I had a bit of a scrap to-night."

"Fighting!"

"And put my man down rather neat. . . . He said the English were a lot of damned pikers. We came within twenty yards o' bein' pinched."

"This isn't a fist war," grunted Zorn. "Better mind your game."

"Good night, sir!"

This seemed to include us both.

"Good night!"

Zorn walked very slowly toward his holy of holies.

"The red hand reaches out," he said, in a voice of muffled hardness. "Grabbing where it can. Beckon-

ing where it must be content to do that. . . . Rudley is getting restless."

"Rudley?"

"It's not enough to offer his engine. . . . He's sure to offer himself. Though lately he has been silent about that."

"He hasn't said a word of the matter to me," I remarked, by way of leading farther.

"No?" He looked at me as if considering the bearings of this, then turned with a wave of his bony hand. "I try to keep war out of here."

We were indeed in his secret haunt—the little room corresponding to my own. But it had no look of mine or any other. At a first glance a housekeeper might not feel sure that he had kept war out of it. If there is such a thing as a precise disorder this nest was an example. You might guess that everything in the jumble was where it was by his appointment. Nevertheless, the effect was of an amazing confusion of books, papers, prints, maps, photographs, cigar-boxes with labels, pasteboard boxes tied with strings, heaps of envelops tied with strings, plaster casts, pipes, and dead clocks. A small part of the table not covered by pamphlets and litter might have been used for the purposes of a writing-desk. The chair in front of this had two cushions and a supplemental wad of newspapers. . . . Evidently he likes to perch high, or else he has neglected to notice that the swivel would elevate it.

As he sat in this chair (the removal of an atlas gave me a seat on the one other chair near by), the light shining on his pink bald place, he looked older than when I saw him for the first time.

At the moment I thought he was resolving not to talk about war.

There are moments when Zorn is strangely transparent—I mean that you can see what is coming, or that he is questioning the situation before questioning his lis-

tener. Thus he gave me a knife-edge glance before asking:

"Are you a collector?"

I hardly thought I was. There had been ferns and minerals. And always books.

"Stamps?"

"Not since I was a boy."

Afterward it was easy to guess that this innocent answer gave him a pang. Actually he made no sign save by an impressive slowness in remarking, "It would be a good thing for a boy."

I thought that his hand left a library rack just behind him and that I was to miss some interesting revelation.

"I can understand . . ." I began.

"That is doubtful," he jerked out. "If you could drop it, then it did not really reach you. Human capacities differ."

"Do you mean capacities or tastes?" I demanded, not too humbly, it may be. At the moment it was not collections I wanted to get at. There was the matter of holding him more in the region of Rudley.

"I mean capacities," he insisted. "Just that. Tastes must have capacity space to grow in. Very likely you think you know something about a thing like stamp study. Yet nothing is more improbable than that you do. It is necessary only to consider what you are not likely to know to appreciate the improbability of your understanding the profound significance of a study like this. You are a professor sort of person, and you may know the difference between a yen and a sen. You may know where the Straits Settlements are, when the Dutch took over Curaçao, when Italy broke into the Levant or that clever old shark Diaz absconded from Mexico. You may know the dialects of Obok, the emblem of the Orange River Colony, the revolutions of Paraguay; be able to count in the krans of Persia, the atts of Siam, or the avos of Timor. You may know

Charkhari, and Gwalior, and Hyderabad, and Jind, and Keda, and Perak, and Sungei Ujong. You may know something of the tragedies of Selangor, or Uganda, or Tibet, and Cundinamarca, and a thousand other superficial facts. But the sheer probability of your knowing, without the study of stamps, the deep-lying significance of human evolution, the intricate wonders of race struggle, the spiritual orientation of that poor, faltering, but amazingly tenacious biped, Man—this probability, I tell you, is absolutely negligible."

He was looking at me now as if fastening me to the back of my chair, and this thought made his next allusion seem rather funny.

"There are people, you know, who would rather stifle a beautiful, harmless butterfly in a cyanide-jar, jab it through the thorax, and fasten its corpse, with meticulous care, upon an exhibition board. This is but a refinement of the instinct for killing. . . .

"Speaking of killing," he said, in a changed voice, as if checking his tirade, "do you know what the Jews have been doing?" He reached for a black-covered book on the table. "They have been translating their Scriptures—in general terms, our Old Testament—telling in English what the Law and the Prophets and the Writings really said and are saying. And the commandment is not 'Thou shalt not kill.' Millions of pacifists and conscientious objectors have hugged this venerable phrase. No, the real adjuration was and is, as transcribed by the scholars who are dealing with their own ancestral writings, 'Thou shalt not murder.' A little different, you see—with a thousand tons more emphasis. No lawgiver could have said, 'Thou shalt not kill,' to peoples directed by Almighty God to righteous slaughter. 'Thou shalt not *murder*' puts a profound point into the admonition. It isn't murder to kill a murdering Hun. It *is* murder to kill a butterfly. . . ."

He burst out again: "Of course you can't imagine a God saying, 'Thou shalt not kill,' to the same Moses or the same Joshua who is intrusted with wholesale exterminations. The authority for the divine instruction to kill a whole tribe, to drive out a whole people and divide the land, to kill a King Og of Bashan and every man, woman, and child in his cities, is given as authority for the divine instruction, 'Thou shalt not kill.' Yes, you'll find all the ruthlessness you want in your Deuteronomy. All the Kaiser has to do is to fancy himself a Moses or a Joshua, and he may smite his breast and cry, 'to drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance.' . . .

"No, 'Thou shalt not murder' is better . . . a little more consistent. A little less an insult to Almighty God."

A pathetic bitterness had come into his voice.

Then of a sudden his eyes caught the letter Stokes had placed on his table.

"Pardon me," he said. His way of saying this sounded like an echo of something he had been rather than of anything he is. There was an almost courtly inflection tinged by an apprehensive eagerness. My impulse was to go away, but it occurred to me that this might seem to accuse his digression. I waited.

He seized the purport of the letter in a sweeping glance, laid the sheet down, and thrust a hand through his hair.

"I shall be going away for a few days," he said, simply.

I believe he went away that night. . . .

This was on Tuesday. On Thursday Sarah came home from one of her successful afternoons in a highly effervescent condition. I could hear her singing in her room. Aunt Portia Rowning had attached her to an important war bazaar committee; she had looked in upon an exhibition of rebellious art for which Pine had

sent her cards; and she had spent an hour at a suffrage-committee meeting. In the evening we were to see three playlets at one of the pocket theaters in Macdougall Street.

Sarah was absurdly merry at the dinner. My aunt took note of her heightened way. I am not likely to forget that whimsical rosiness of Sarah—that quaint mannerism of her lips when she is mischievous, or that soft, teasing look of her eyes, with that recurring flash like a spark in a pool.

She laughed at my aunt's admonition about coats; she laughed at my solicitude about my tie; she laughingly led the way when it was our time to start.

"Three plays," she was saying as she snuggled her chin into her fur collar and laid her hand on the knob of the door. "*Three* plays! I wonder will they . . ."

At the pause I saw that she was peering beyond the partly opened door . . . peering with a body rigid and utterly still. The thing was not to be explained by anything that came to my mind while I waited. Her intentness, a locking of every volitional muscle, somehow was communicated instantly in her outline. If she had opened the door to find lift and staircase in a heap at the bottom of a pit she would have started back and she would have cried out. But she neither moved nor made the faintest sound.

I had opened my lips to speak when I heard the closing of a door.

It was then that she slowly turned about, pushing the knob in her hand until the click came.

"Laura—Laura Sherrick. . . ." She finished with a gesture, an inept faltering motion with her finger.

"Into Rudley's rooms?"

She nodded.

I have always been sensitive to exaggerated descriptions of emotional signs, especially to notations of pallor. Yet I know now that blood may leave a face

until but a shadow remains. Sarah looked at me with eyes that acted as if a physical blow had fallen squarely upon them, though this would have made the eyelids quiver, whereas she simply stared . . . stared. Her lips, parted in a hard line, were as colorless as her cheeks. And there she stood, stock still . . . as still as I was.

"Damn him!" I said.

I don't know which of us made the first movement.

I knew that my aunt remarked, "What did you forget?" as we appeared again before her.

"Forget?" I laughed. "Forget is very good—especially good. You couldn't have hit it better."

"What do you mean?" demanded my aunt, with a look at Sarah. "Why, *Sarah*—!"

"It is nothing of importance," I said, "except that Laura Sherrick is visiting her friend Mr. Rudley."

The next question of my aunt was entirely characteristic.

"Are you quite sure?"

Sarah laughed—the most unbeautiful laugh of her career.

"Oh yes! Quite sure."

We went over it. At least we had begun to do so, each of us in his or her own way, when Sarah was up again.

"Well," she said, hooking the fur at her neck, "we're off for the three plays."

"Wait a moment—" I began.

But I saw that we were to go.

Two of the plays were very solemn. I regretted the proportion.

## PART FOUR

### *Changed Horizons*

#### I

**T**HAT interval in the old valley seems to have been needed for the perspective.

At first the picture of things looked freakish, twisted ludicrously . . . especially when I had Sarah in range.

She had been jolted pretty badly—that is beyond question. The door she had opened was not to be closed again at her will. No Mrs. Bluebeard could have had more of a shock. To estimate the shock was to guess how far she had gone with Rudley. I couldn't look at her bustling off to Naugaway, staring through the train window at the snow-splashed Connecticut landscapes, holding mother at arm's-length, chirping cleverly on the edges of the home nest, jabbing at the log fire, slashing at the piano keys, or, as she silhouetted in sweater and toque against the white and gray of the valley, without seeing again that frozen moment in the passage, without feeling again the extraordinary reaction from that sudden torpedoing of our craft.

Naturally I will be left to go on guessing how she felt toward Rudley, how much of meaning there was in that exaltation of every trait in her I knew.

There is a Diana side to Sarah, very proud and sure and relentless—something bigger than any coquetry, as much above coquetry as they tell us courage is above mere bravery. And there is a Madonna side, too—you can trace it in her way of looking at a baby. As between



a dog and a baby—anybody's baby—you wouldn't be in any doubt as to the leap of Sarah's interest. This, I take it, is not the Diana side of her at all. Yet both facets are there, and both her swinging pride and her imaginative tenderness have been hit hard.

Perhaps something like this is needed to change a girl into a woman. The kind of woman will depend . . . on more than any man can know.

We say that the past is secure. But if our friends hold keys how can we be sure that the past will not be rifled? Disenchantment is the supreme theft. The friend who fails absconds with our dearest funds.

After all, it is possible that Laura Sherrick is more a grief than Rudley is. Rudley may be charged up to the sex hazard. Laura Sherrick was playing the part of a friend. She knew that Rudley had seen Sarah. Allowing for any possible reticence on Sarah's part—and in the matter of reticence she is no subnormal eccentric—it is inconceivable that Laura did not know or suspect something of the real fact. And if she knew something of the real fact, her silence was a wretchedly unfriendly trick, sinister enough in itself. As for all that lies behind the matter of her visit to his rooms . . . Well, perhaps Sarah and I are both stupidly innocent to have gone into any debate. For we have debated.

"You know," I said, "Laura Sherrick is an Individualist." I wanted that to have the nastiest possibilities. On my own part I wanted it to gather up all the irony communicated by her dissertation on honesty. "It was an Individualist's deception."

"I can't believe she's a liar," came from under the bruised shell of Sarah.

"Did she deny knowing him?"

"There never was occasion—not exactly."

"A lie isn't merely a word," I expostulated, too bitter to wish to be sententious. "She was acting a lie, wasn't she? Isn't that plain? Acting the dirtiest kind of a

lie. Like an Individualist. Why shouldn't an Individualist lie if it is convenient? A lie is a consideration belonging to a notion of the Fabric. The Individualist must, I suppose, deny the Fabric. It is part of the whole horrible anarchistic idea to go straight after what you want. And devil take the hindmost. Just as you would expect from a person with the brazen nerve to sneak into a house that way . . . a cigarette-smoking radical, smeared with the muck of mental libertinism, a dolled-up social misfit cursed with an ingenious tongue—and eyes."

Yes, I ranted considerably. But I'm through with that. It isn't much consolation that I wasn't altogether fooled. I'm past thinking of consolations. It is done with. Not only because Sarah said she didn't want to hear any more. There is the practical need to get rid of the dragging memory.

Sarah began this getting rid of memories when she wrote that curt note to Rudley the day we went away. I say curt, because she volunteered the information that she had been very brief. They were to have gone to the War Bazaar. The plan to go, as appears from a fragmentary confession, had for an incident something like a quarrel. I may yet learn just what this was. It had, I am sure, some relation to a discussion of chance—maybe the word "lottery" was used. At all events, Sarah came out with some pungent use of the word "gambling." Nothing need have blazed from that had not Rudley tossed in some teasing flippancy about New England. They would have been wiser to have kept a good length away from that antecedent misunderstanding. Probably neither of them thought of going back until the words carried them there. In fact, it was simply an absurd bit of sparring with a sting in it that would mean little enough in itself but for the disaster of our discovery, and but for the relation established between the incident of their talk and Sarah's later note.

When Sarah insisted on starting on our holiday home-

going five days before the planned time I knew the reason. So did my aunt. Flight seemed natural enough. Without knowing about the War Bazaar affair, it was intolerable enough to face that next possible meeting. By now I could have met Rudley with a kind of levelness. But for a time after that night it would have been difficult to fix the angle. Sarah, with the specific appointment in mind, saw flight as a simple escape. To have gone without writing the note would have told him something she chose not to tell him. She preferred to have him think—he couldn't very well help it—that their discussion rankled. Yet her expedient was no triumph.

"I wish," she said to me at the icy edge of our little river, "that I hadn't let him think I was infant enough to be annoyed by a fool squabble."

"Either that," said I, "or telling him the truth. Evidently you didn't want to tell him the truth—that you had caught him. That would have finished off everything."

"It was like spying," she burst out.

Just because she saw it through her own partly opened door and had kept quiet! This was squirming in that complicated head of hers. It didn't alter the fact, but it gave a twist to her view of the case, all the same. To have gone away without explanation would have seemed to her violent enough to include an accusation of what she knew—and she didn't like the way she came to know it. So there was the sort of note that left him to think she was much annoyed. And if she was annoyed it must be the tiff. There you have it. And a mess of feminine subtleties it is.

She was, I hope, a little simpler in putting the matter before my mother.

## II

This placing of the matter before my mother occurred, I suspect, very late in the first evening of our return to Naugaway.

We had taken the afternoon train to Brannington, had waited, as usual, for the rumble of the iron bridge, for landmarks like the marble-quarry, the tobacco-barns under the corner of Sage Hill, the Haunted House with the great gate-posts, and had swung round the curve to the station to discover old Weyton and his shabby car, and mother bristling on the platform not far away.

Mothers look good to perplexed children, even when the perplexed children are somewhat of age. I suppose that recent association with my fat aunt made mother seem thin. In fact, she is not thin. Her quick, alert, appreciating way gives her a wonderful lightness of presence that often carries something girlish in it. In my most romantic period I used to regard her intently (generally over the top of a book) and fancy how she might look in ermine with a crown. It was disconcerting that the crown sometimes fell off in the course of one of her plunging activities. Nevertheless, I liked to insist with myself that there was an essentially queenly cast to her head and shoulders—she had a way of wearing a simple collar thing that was like certain pictures of Marie Antoinette. When I had successfully imagined her as a queen, and particularly during one of the intervals when the crown seemed to be staying on, I inevitably became the poor crippled prince . . . and Sarah was the rather trying princess.

Mother was always a great deal firmer than my father, and probably, on the whole, somewhat juster. My father had an erratic gentleness that did not make for domestic discipline. Having objectified the idea of discipline in the school, he could carry the thing through very well. But domestically he was like a minority stockholder. He had the rewards of his gentleness. I have no doubt he found a way of getting along without the rewards of undisputed authority.

I don't mean that my mother domineered. She is a Rowning, and no Rowning I know of sets out to win

by domineering. But she has a way of making her initiative seem inevitable. Though her wishes are not always eager or assertive, they are definite. She always knows what she wants to do and what she wants others to do. This is not so remarkable as her way of making you glad of it.

For example, we naturally sat as she placed us in the car—Sarah on her left—without sense of an intruded wish. Probably her gusto has a good deal to do with the results. Despite her shrewdness, and something whimsically caustic that often goes in her judgments, she is essentially an appreciator. You would gather that she always had been lucky, if not that Providence, repeatedly and by habit, had slipped through some very handsome juggling in her interest. I remember that my grandmother was credited with the remark, "I believe Catherine could be happy in the cellar with a ton of coal."

She was likely to make a point of having very simple tastes because my father liked to lumber the house with souvenirs and "truck." She accused him of never throwing away anything, and he complained that he never did throw away anything without wanting it badly within the week. She insisted steadfastly that *things* were a burden. It was necessary to be rather secretive about old magazines or any sort of collection.

When Aunt Paul asked her, on a certain occasion, "What do you want for your birthday?" her answer was characteristic:

"Oh, give me a kiss and I won't have to dust it."

I can fancy how joyously she turned over to the rebuilding of the Academy that substantial fund from her share of the Rowning inheritance. I think she must have found something fascinating in the fact that when she married my father he had nothing in the world but a shelf of books. She would, I believe, have shied at a man who was much surrounded with anything—even with money.

"Isn't it wonderful that you should come on such a day!" she cried, as Weyton, with the effect of clucking to an old horse, let the chattering car have its head on the river road.

With hands outstretched to touch both of us, she sat in ecstatic satisfaction as if inhaling the sunset. Her face shone through the frosty twilight, and her voice—well, her voice tingled with *mother*. There are no words for the voice of a mother—not that a son may measure.

It was she and her kindling emotion rather than any enthusiasm of mine that glorified the valley, filling its shadowed spaces with floods of violet and icy glints of turquoise and amber. In the far bowl of the hills the sky glowed like champagne. Everything was fantastically still. The wooded stretches, spotted with larch and fir and balsam, and showing here and there the stark chestnuts whose death by blight had given me such a pang, were spectrally silent-looking in the windless cold.

In the time of bare branches one may see through a notch to the north, midway of the journey from Brannington, a large white house backed by a grove of hemlocks—the long-deserted Rudley place. If Sarah gave to this a glance I failed to catch the sign. . . .

Father stood in the doorway as we came up the path. He had been detained by some tangle of affairs incidental to the despatch of home-going boys, and his look was a blend of preoccupation and fervent welcome. The tall, lank figure, topped by the shaggy hair, recalled that thrill of awed affection which recurrently punctuated our comrade friendship. He has a long stoop to kiss me . . . a thing that more than once has been contemplated with curiosity, most frankly, of course, by boy spectators of such an incident. Shall we, when he is eighty and I am fifty-six, still be holding to the symbolism? Doubtless old men gradually lose a sense of need or beauty in such signs. Eye and voice must come more and more to satisfy the spirit, to express sufficiently the

bonds and impulses once reflected in contact. Yet I should hate to lose something close, vital, possessive, that comes in the ultimate touch.

Ah yes! Before that log fire there was once again a warm world!

The faces that turned to the flame (there had been, naturally, a vociferous dinner) were wonderfully kindled, yet at the same time seemed withdrawn as by the solemnity of significant reunion.

With his long legs stretched toward the grate and his fingers laced above his watch-cord, father reminded me anew of my ancient belief in something Emersonian about his make-up. That one cigar allotted to the evening may not have been Emersonian, but his silhouette surely bore the resemblance, though I fancy he is even taller than the Concord philosopher was—taller and with bolder bones. I used to measure him among picturesque men and find him satisfactory. I have a vague memory of him standing beside Beecher over at Litchfield; and of John Fiske, and Doctor Hale, and Edward Eggleston, and Mark Twain (who spoke at the school and took me on his back to help raid an apple-tree).

Mother's look said plainly, "I have them all with me!" She was building pictures in the blazing hickory.

Sarah sat with her chin in her hand.

The shadow of a kind of sadness flickers over every reunion. When reminiscence, and curiosity, and reappraisal, and deferred adjustment all have had expression, and even when no common consciousness of an intervening loss or discord lays hand on the group, there creeps in a pathos that belongs, I suppose, to the ebb and flow of the emotions, that does not accord with tears nor with laughter—a sweet, perhaps a holy kind of sadness, yet a sadness suffusing the mind as poignantly as a twinge of the senses. . . .

Coming back out of the crowd, I saw my father not

diminished—perhaps rather as heightened—but with a sense, not easily to be explained, of a futility in many aspirations, of something inconsequential in certain things that always had stood up as of indisputable importance. I saw in him more of the grind and less of the glory, more of the bruise of work with less of assurance as to what it would mean to him to have done it. I saw that I myself was sure to realize with an increasing intensity of conviction, with a steadily deepening passion of pride, the nobility of his character and his purposes, and I saw, too, or had begun to feel, not merely that disparity between labor and reward—this would concern him not at all—but that more appalling disparity between anything that may be done and the awful weight of the indifference, inertia, perversity, stupidity, and greed, and all that never can be done, on the other side.

I saw my mother, still with the queenly head of my boy dream, but dimmer in her quiet moments, not above suspicion of pains that catch her up when she is most eager for the strength of a wild creature, with something more brittle in her energy, something softer in her eyes.

I saw Sarah through the lens of a Fact. I saw her transmuted into a woman. . . . Still, Sarah, with that leaping flame of fancy and adventurousness that seemed to make her sister to the fire, but for the first time halted if not a daunted Sarah. I saw her recasting her world. Any woman must do that, perhaps again and again. Quite naturally it would be in the heart of such a group that she would readjust her outlook. She might agree with herself that we make our own tragedies, that this or that does not greatly matter, and so on to the end of the catechism of soul anesthesia. But all the same I knew that she saw her path uptorn and was still quivering from shell shock.

I saw myself, warmed and comforted—huddled a bit



in the process—and feeling at the same time a hovering doubt, the shadow of a shadow, out of which came ugly whispered questions as to The Great Desire—that worthwhileness query that is, I suppose, the subtlest chain ever fastened upon the striding Wish. I saw something flamboyant, quixotic, ludicrous in the spectacle of a puny scribbler scurrying off to a city to write a book . . . with so much piercingly imperative work to be done for the earth's people . . . with desires crying not for analysis, but for response; with the blood and brain of the races urged to frenzied effort: with simple hungers—wholly explicable, wholly elemental stare-you-in-the-face hungers—sobbing their inarticulate want on the shoulder of the world.

Then came the revulsion . . . and the sharp thud of the door-knocker.

Father had spoken out of the silence—

“And about the Book . . .?”

In the instant of his question, I don't know by what fantastic reaction I suddenly saw again the clear way—the clear need. I heard, as of a voice not my own, the rebuff to my doubt. Perhaps it was merely my father's question and something sent out by that question—some quality of echo from all that I had said to him in my passionate struggle to see and to solve, with something of his expectant curiosity or concern—that set into a blaze the hope that smoldered. By whatever trick of the currents, I saw in a glowing certainty that the very complexity of my doubts presented an imperative—that the discoverer of the Great Wish would have lighted the Great Path.

“It is begun. I've made a heap of notes.”

This was what I contrived to say, and the saying sounded rather flat. To fling yourself into the vortex of life (this was the way I used to fancy it) and to emerge after so little flinging, with so shadowy a sense of vortex, and to submit as the fruit of your puttering a banal

report of progress and announcement of "a heap of notes," was grotesque to the grinning-point. Yet I knew that the way stretched onward—I was forward in the chair . . . on my feet at last, for Heaven knows what reason, as if to make a speech about it, though I hadn't a word.

I stood there, amazed at the rush of the thing that had happened in my brain, interrogating the backlog, when the knocker sounded.

It was not long after nine o'clock, but that is well past any visiting-hour at Naugaway. It was also past the time when old Bertha locked the back doors and shuffled, quietly and with a precise deliberation, up the back stairs to her bedroom.

Because I happened to be on my feet in that absurd way, it was I who went to the door.

The night was clear, without a moon, and there was a moment in which I made out simply a human bundle, a man, the vapor of whose breath emerged over the edge of a muffler.

I swung the door wide to get the full light of the hall upon the figure.

"Grayl himself!" said a voice.

Then I saw that it was Zorn, still standing quite still as if only to be moved by a specific summons to enter.

### III

Although it could hardly be said that this was a happy hour for such a matter, I found myself instantly glad to see Zorn and to be able to make him known to my people. Any other visitor might have explained, or have started to explain, in the first breath the reason for so bewildering an anomaly. He did indeed indicate at once that he supposed I was still in New York. This served to make his coming the more inexplicable.

He submitted to the removal of the muffler, but re-

fused to part with the overcoat. He would be going in a moment, he said.

By the intricate process of translation which it is necessary to practise with Zorn it began to appear that he had called to see my father.

He looked intently at my mother in the greeting, gave Sarah his equivalent for a smile. My father he regarded absently, as if thinking about him rather than looking at him.

"I had certain business near here," he said, when we had him seated in the circle. "I remembered the place of the Academy and found that it was not far away."

"I'm glad you came," said my father, cordially. I could see by his glance that he was gathering up all that I had told him about Zorn.

"Some of your roads are very bad," Zorn added.

We echoed agreement.

"Very bad," he repeated. "Did it ever occur to you that a good horse is better than a bad machine?"

"Frequently," laughed my father, "when I was in the bad machine."

Zorn nodded. "I wouldn't let him come up this last bit of hill. The thing seemed to be strangling. He's down at a village store—the store of a man who wanted to close up and I wouldn't let him."

I could imagine Barker's feelings.

Zorn then said, abruptly, "I wanted to ask you, Doctor Grayl, if you ever heard of a man named Waincrove."

"Waincrove?" My father pondered for a moment. "I don't seem to recall . . ."

"He was in the Legislature for a time—owned considerable property—grew a good deal of tobacco."

"Ah yes!" My father remembered Waincrove now. "He had a boy . . ."

Zorn did not seem to be interested in the boy, "Did you know a chap named Hannigan?"

We all remembered Hannigan. He had been in the school, too.

"What sort of boy was he?" demanded Zorn.

"He became a prize-fighter," returned my father, with a whimsical grin.

"But—" Zorn showed signs of regarding the answer as an evasion.

"I always found him a decent boy—he had a good father and rather a remarkable grandfather," added my mystified parent.

"That is always significant," observed Zorn, thoughtfully. Presently he added, "There is another point—do you remember that this Waincrove had a daughter?"

"My recollection is rather confused," confessed my father, "and yet . . ." He sat up in his chair, with the last of his allotted cigar between the fingers of an extended hand. "Yes, I remember that there was a daughter."

Zorn turned to him. "Did you ever hear what became of the daughter?"

My father seemed to be hesitating for an instant, or to be searching his recollection, and my mother made a sound as if about to speak.

"The girl . . .? It seems to me that she went away with Wendell Rudley's daughter."

It suddenly became plain that Zorn had learned something that he wanted to know, or of which he wanted to be convinced. At all events, he made a gesture as if to get out of his chair, his eyes turning for a moment to the fire. Instead of rising it occurred to him to remark:

"Perhaps what I have said may have seemed rather inquisitorial. But I'm not looking for gossip. I hope you will believe that I have a proper purpose."

"I'm sure of it," said my father.

Zorn's lips twisted in that queer smile of his. "One may undertake to be useful and yet be very foolish. Have you discovered that?"

He turned about to my mother.

"You should be proud to have a good son—and a good daughter."

"I am," said my mother.

"Hold fast to them—without hooks."

"I want them to hold fast to me," added my mother.

"Splendid!" cried Zorn, slapping the arm of his chair. "Splendid! And you won't accomplish that by making them feel a debt to you. It never can be done in that way. You accomplish it by feeling a debt to them. What a cheap notion the world has of *bonds*! A father who, for any offense conceivable or inconceivable, says, 'Never darken my door again!' is a travesty of fatherhood—a hideous caricature of a man."

This was quite in the Zorn manner. I recognized the manner without being able to surmise the special occasion, unless it was simply the sight of a happy family group. Yet a happy family group need not have occasioned a fiery outburst on the subject of parental perversity. That the remark bore some relation to the man Waincrove was the only possible suggestion that came to me by way of afterthought. By the same road of afterthought I concluded that something vital to the information he was after lay in my father's recollection that the Waincrove girl had gone away with Wendell Rudley's daughter. I had not remembered, if I ever knew, that Wendell Rudley had a daughter.

No one but Zorn, I was sure, could have put my father through this brief third degree without himself seeming more grotesque than Zorn had seemed while he did it. If some headquarters man with a queer eye and a scar on his upper lip had opened his bag of tricks in front of our fireplace we could have had no better excuse for astonishment. Yet Zorn, with far less of ingenuity than any detective would have felt called upon to use, in fact, with no ingenuity at all, had managed

to arouse only an intense curiosity, not so much as to the Waincrove matter as to himself.

And only Zorn could have created a situation in which no one asked him a question. Perhaps his "I hope you will believe that I have a proper purpose" had something to do with this. At all events, we sat and watched and listened.

While I watched I saw Zorn's eyes draw intently to Sarah, who met the look frankly. There was a little movement of her lips as she waited.

"You are coming back to New York?" he asked.

"Yes." She spoke quickly, as if replying to the echo of a challenge earlier than this—perhaps to her own.

"Good!"

Zorn stood up, then turned to me.

"And the man who is writing a book—is he coming, too?"

"Assuredly," I said. "We shall see you next year."

"Next year? Do you know, a little astrologer chap has been telling me that nineteen hundred and seventeen will be a wonderful year. I suppose it is that infantile notion of the wonderful year that keeps us going. Probably we are fooling ourselves in the same way about the years Beyond."

"I'm glad we can," declared my mother. "And I don't think it's an infantile notion."

Zorn assured himself that she was smiling.

"I mean," he said, wavering in a movement toward departure—"I mean that we've certainly got to fight it out on the Other Side as well as on this."

"Why not?" my mother demanded, "if you mean *work* it out."

"You are quite right." Zorn extended his hand gravely. "I'm talking like an irritable old man who shouldn't be permitted to profane with peevish thoughts a household like yours. That is true," he went on as

he took my father's hand. "There is peace here. Good night!"

My father and I followed him to the door. I went as far as the gate to see him rightly started down the road toward the village. He walked squarely in the middle of the way, his head down, one hand holding the muffler.

It was not until I lost his figure at the turn of the road and had scurried with a shiver back into the house that I fully grasped the amazing oddity of the incident; the oddity of this last bit of the journey on foot, of my not knowing where he came from out of that cold darkness, or where he would spend the night. For a moment I felt like running after him with an absolutely peremptory expostulation.

"What a strange man!" exclaimed my mother.

This was the inevitable view of him.

"It scarcely seemed hospitable to let him go," my father remarked, with a puzzled contrition. "Should we have urged him to stay?"

I tried to convince them that Zorn was not to be controlled, or gave that effect, which amounts to the same thing. After saying that he was going in a moment, he might prolong the moment, but he would not change his plan. Whatever he was doing he would do in his plunging way to the end. They might be sure of that.

"What do you suppose he *is* doing?" my mother demanded.

"If I made a guess," I said, "it would be that he is in the throes of some feverish benevolence with a New York end to it." I recalled the matter of a letter that occasioned his statement that he was going away for a few days.

We talked about Zorn for a long time—Zorn rather than the shadowy affair to which he alluded. I have thought that there was a characteristic reticence in our common avoidance of the hidden feature—the thing Zorn had chosen to leave unnamed; not so much, of

course, because he hadn't disclosed it or because it belonged with gossip if not with scandal—at all events, with things that were not our business. How Zorn's attention came to be reached was a matter too obviously strange for admission. So we reverted to Zorn himself. As a hearthside subject he was obscure enough to be inexhaustible. . . . I winced at the recollection of his figure melting into the dark.

It was freshly disconcerting to feel so ignorant as to Zorn. I wondered whether that ignorance was due to his peculiarities or to mine—whether I was, indeed, as I have often suspected, constitutionally incapable of penetration in the matter of character. Possibly we all have these hopeless moments in which the world seems to be a reiteration of shells, of mere appearances—sounds, gestures, clothes, or what not—concealing realities, motive elements, potentialities of which we know nothing at all. In such moments I often wonder whether life isn't largely made up of devices for obscuring the very essence of life, whether in a large way we are so very different from a peering, muttering group at a masquerade, absurdly hiding our own identity while interrogating the identity of others, fatuously delighted to discover without being discovered. . . .

Meanwhile, there was Sarah, slanting into our discussion at times, and returning to the backlog with that new look from under the long lashes.

She was for being impatient about Zorn without telling us very clearly why she felt as she did. And she was not disposed to have the discussion include Rudley just then. Rudley was named. This was inevitable. But he escaped review in those first hours because Sarah managed to avoid the precipitating step—and because I secretly connived.

In view of the certainty that Rudley was in every mind the evasion became rather pointed, which could not be what Sarah wished. It was not what I wished. This



was not the time for debating anything so complicated, and I had no desire to see Sarah wince under concerted observation—still less desire to hear her quibble or become bitterly flippant, as she well might when lovingly driven into a corner.

Yet in the deepest sense we four were the parties in interest and it seemed rather pathetic not to have the thing done with. There was something epochal in our evasion. The hand of the outlander had at last reached into the realm of the family. Father, mother, son, daughter—and then that primal encroachment that touches the daughter heart. All very simple. As trite as Testaments. One thought of all the times when such a matter had seemed to occasion a ludicrous fuss, when people acted as if they were the objects of a new kind of cataclysm, when fathers' frowns seemed grotesquely brutal, and brothers made selfish asses of themselves. Yet what an amazing amount of history eddies around this elemental commonplace! As for poor Romance, it would go broke without it. And we sat there as humanly as the rest of them. And I'm writing down the commonplace with a throb of awe because I know, nevertheless, that I have heard the dominant note of the eternal. . . .

"I'm tired!"

Sarah was standing with the firelight rimming her straight figure.

My mother was up in a moment. "So am I."

Sarah crossed over to my father's place and kissed the gray tangle of his hair.

"Good night, daddy!"

"Good night, my dear!"

We all stood in a group at last, with our arms fantastically interlaced, drawing all the heads as near together as might be with due allowance for the submergence of mine. It was one of our old tricks—a kind of love-knot accomplished with eight arms.

"You see we *are* bound to get together again!" cried my mother.

"And we're *such* a superior family!" grunted my father in the pressure.

Mother and Sarah went up-stairs together.

Father and I sat before the fire for a time, talking of the Academy. . . . Up there in Sarah's room, unless all rules were revoked, my mother was getting the story she had waited for . . . without suspecting the sort of story it would turn out to be.

Even if signs had failed the story would have been precipitated by that letter coming two days later.

Sarah did an unusual thing. She laid the letter before me, without a word.

It was from Rudley on the eve of sailing for France.

An all of a sudden matter [he said] as to the time of sailing. I can't be sure the craft will really get off in the morning. But we go aboard to-night—me and the engine! Of course they had to satisfy themselves that my little machine-crate didn't hold a bomb—and maybe I pulled a few wires to get the thing into my state-room. Anyway, there it is, just for company.

You see I couldn't wait any longer. Not even to give the United States the glory of that great invention! The opportunity seemed to bob up. I want to see the best they have on the other side. And I want to get into the great game in the quickest way a man can get into it. The sky fight is the biggest chance of all.

Gambler!

I wish I might have seen you again. I'm afraid something went wrong. I should like to have found out whether you cared to know that I was sorry for anything I had to do with its going wrong—for any fool thing I had said. Probably I'm flattering myself. Only you were very brief. People are not usually so brief as that unless—anyway I *am* sorry. It would have been rather nice to have had you look at the engine in its traveling-clothes the way you looked at it that night (I mean before it bit you!) and maybe to have had you wish me

luck, or something like that. As it is, unless Zorn comes home within an hour I shall have to endure the rather pathetic sensation of wishing myself luck. It can be done. There may be something rather thrilling about it. No tears or anything. The fact is that I haven't given my highly restricted group of New York friends a chance to say any of the wonderful things they might say under such impressive circumstances. I haven't felt sure enough that I should get away. This won't go unless I do.

Then he has gone. So much for that.

Some day, although you haven't sanctioned such a thing, I shall write to you from France. I don't see how you can prevent such an awkward occurrence. Perhaps this will be after they really say they will take me. I understand that American cheek isn't all they ask. You never can tell—I may bluff my way into the sky—even if they are rather haughty about the engine.

Anyway, I wish you would extend my heartiest greetings to your mother and Doctor Grayl and that you would tell Anson I hope he will forgive me for the perversity of writing to you instead of to him. So good a philosopher as he is will see at once that I had no parting apology reason for addressing him. Besides, writing to a literary person is a stiff job when you're fussed. My mind will be more settled when the boat gets started. I'll write to him between submarines.

Faithfully,

R. H. R.

My mother shook her head over the whole Rudley business.

"A wild boy," was her summing up.

"And yet," said my father, "wild boys will be a lot of use in this war."

"I don't mean," my mother rejoined, "that he isn't too good to send to slaughter."

Sarah laughed unpleasantly. "He's found a new game."

It was as if she, too, had said, "Gambler!"

## IV

I came back to New York in a rage of great intentions. As I told my father in that snug talk we had on the day before Sarah and I started away from the valley (through a wonderful swirl of snow), the way to the thing I had set out to do in that first stage had begun to seem much clearer. If there were moments—savage, slumpy times—when I seemed to have accomplished nothing at all, when I seemed simply to have dawdled and stared, there were many others in which I could see that being caught up by all sorts of accidental, objectively trivial things might have a margin of profit—that real experience can't have a logical order.

In the detachment of the old home I began to see new meanings. It was possible in that quiet to understand that the noise we call a city has the symphonic quality of being made up of obscurely co-ordinated elements any one of which may be and perhaps must be vague enough in itself. And it was possible, too, to surmise that in the still larger orchestration of all of life there would be of necessity the same complexity of effect. So that unless one had distance in which to gather and focus the sounds there must often be the appearance of detached and meaningless tootings of individual expression.

It does not matter that any such fancy should be utterly trite as a matter of philosophy. I am concerned in the one vital point—the revealed instinct of Wish. I must know for myself, by listening now beside this player in the great orchestra, and now beside that, not what is the true meaning of the symphony—that is beyond human ken—not merely what would be in each player's heart, pointing to which instrument or which tune he would play if he had his free choice, but just what is the common dream, if there is a common dream, that lights the pages of the scores.

When my father said, back in the summer, "Isn't this rather a large order?" he was speaking without irony. I knew that he didn't wish to check or discourage me. He would know that sheer bigness could be no deterrent. He must, however, have felt the obligation to suggest that the question *is* big, to suggest, perhaps, that the question is more inclusive than any first impulse might have measured.

"And yet," I said, "it may come like a flash."

He understood well enough. He saw, I have no doubt, the gambling instinct bluffing the whisperings of judgment.

We say, "If I had known what I should have to go through . . ."

But in the matter of discouragements the great fact is not ignorance of obstacles. These are pretty well advertised. The great fact is the gambling hope of beating the game.

We need to be fortified not so much against unexpected obstacles as against the chagrin of not winning early—of missing that "like a flash," and of beginning to doubt the support of the gambling hope.

I suppose Hope is the sister of Desire. Desire is the big, strong brother. He is bound to go on, no matter how Sister Hope may falter. Yet he needs her tremendously. . . .

I am working out these basic things in the Book.

And this journal of mine, like a sister to the Book, is a patient listener to the story of myself.

The right to a little time of dreaming and watching and listening I have earned by working very hard. Call it a sabbatical year. Call it a year in which life has new horizons, in which I may climb any prominence and watch the other travelers, or laborers, or skulkers . . . or stare at other dreamers as I do at the girl across the way.

One doesn't need a sabbatical year to find a Felicia. Yet only my sabbatical year happened to bring about

the finding of this Felicia. Plant in a man's mind the idea of finding a Felicia and we have abundant explanation of the wanderer, the adventurer, the pioneer. For if we substitute the image of a nugget for the image of a girl the explanation is just as vivid. In the matter of a woman the trouble would begin when Felicia disappointed . . . or refused to be found. Looking for Felicia might become merely an adventurous habit, whereas pluralizing a Felicia would be fatal. One doesn't think of two destinations . . . two stars of Bethlehem.

## V

For Sarah the coming back to New York had something of defiance.

The day of our coming was slushy, with a wet wind. But the slippery city was no longer an abstraction. It might be an uncompleted experiment, but it was less mysterious. I believe that Sarah knew where she was going in both meanings of the phrase. Her head was high and her cheeks responsive to the tingle.

Alonzo parted with the evening paper to grin a welcome and run us up in the elevator.

Aunt Paul, who had joined the Rownings at Christmas dinner, who had paid her annual homage to "The Messiah," helped in the functioning of a settlement Christmas tree, entertained on New-Year's Day a Mrs. Teenston, a very old friend from Alabama, and accomplished other diversions and duties that must have made the interval of our absence rather busy, gave us welcome with a closely scrutinizing cordiality.

I wondered whether she saw in Sarah's face that something which had seemed to me like defiance.

Perhaps what she saw and what she had been thinking may have given a special tenderness to her greeting of Sarah, though she would be the last person in the world to commit the fault of making this apparent.

"And so," she said, "they didn't lock the home cage when they got you back!"

"They are very shrewd parents," said Sarah.

"And very hopeful," said I.

It soon came out—as soon as might be without losing the quality of the incidental—that Rudley had made a farewell call.

"He looked so strong and earnest," said Aunt Paul, "and was so far from slopping over, that I found my feelings horribly mixed. After all, he's going across to fight."

Evidently she had made up her mind to get this in. She had herself to justify in whatever had been her manner toward him, and if the incident was to be closed as to Sarah and me she rather preferred, I suspect, to have it closed decently. It was like folding his hands in a casket. All of which made me wince. There is no comfort in being thrown back on your own indignations. It is more exhilarating to fight for them.

"I had a letter from him," said Sarah, quietly.

"Not explaining . . .?" My aunt flared into intensity of interest.

"Explaining?" Sarah understood. "No, not that. He doesn't know."

My aunt's excitement subsided.

When Sarah said, "He doesn't know," it came to me sharply that the same fact applied to Laura Sherrick. If Laura Sherrick didn't know, what was to be done about her? Rudley is on the high seas. Laura Sherrick, I reminded myself, might dumfound us at any moment. Sarah's worst enemy, if she had an enemy, couldn't wish an awkwardness more acute than that. Yet it surely seemed to impend. There could be no way out. Sarah couldn't go on seeming to be the adoring friend . . .

As if to drive in a wedge against any evasion Pine called on Sarah last night.

This was not so startling as facing Laura Sherrick

herself. A sense of the alternative made Pine seem less annoying.

Sarah surprised me by greeting him with a sort of dash. Women go into such heartless exuberances without any apparent consciousness of the immoral side of them.

Pine was not wearing his "Desire of Love" manner. He came in with that peering, eager, uncombed look as if some one had just awakened him to say that there was a fire. The truth is, I suppose, that he had had a sudden thought and was acting thereon before it flickered out.

"I did call up," he said, brightly, "to ask if I might. Last week. You weren't here. Only a foreign-sounding voice—the maid, I guess. So that I felt that I *had* asked you."

"I never should have expected you to do anything of the kind," said Sarah. "I mean use a telephone—you hating inventions so desperately."

"How droll!" said Pine. "I suppose the telephone *is* an invention, though one thinks of it only as a brutal kind of convenience, a sort of benign nuisance. At that, I believe the world would be better without it. Don't you at least half-way believe that, Mr. Grayl?"

"About a quarter way," said I.

"The thing is giving all of us the jumps. Of course I wouldn't have it in my place. But it gets one everywhere. It is hammering at the ear-drum of the world. It has killed the art of letter-writing, or finishing up the job the typewriter began—if that did come first. I forget. I should like to forget all such things and get back to . . ."

My aunt joined us and served to quell Pine for a moment. I wondered whether she would increase or diminish the chance that he might read verses to us. Possibly she prevented him from dismissing her as negligible by her way of saying:



"You were trying to forget something. Don't let me interrupt."

"Good Lord!" Pine exclaimed. "Don't you suppose we're all in the same boat? I never forget anything but the thing I should remember. It's pitiful, really. For example, there is a splendid legend I found somewhere in Sanskrit literature. And it got away from me. Sometimes I have believed it was in the 'Atharva-veda.' Sometimes in the 'Catapatha Brahmana.' But I've never been able to find it again. I can't remember anything of it but a wonderful White Girl—all white, you understand, white hair, white eyes, everything white, like marble, but living . . . and amazingly beautiful. There was much more—including the point of the whole story. It is maddening to lose a possession like that. . . . As if you had opened a treasure-box to look for a wonderful jewel for which at last you had found a setting, and then discovered that it was gone, vanished."

"Speaking of forgetting—or remembering," said Sarah, "I've wanted to remember to ask you about Anarchism."

"How extraordinary!" cried Pine.

"Why?" demanded Sarah.

"You mean that you wanted me to explain it?"

"If you can," suggested Sarah.

"You amaze me!" Pine said. "Really, you do. I never have supposed that any one wanted to have Anarchism explained. I thought people sat up nights trying to think of ways of misunderstanding it."

"It must have a *meaning*," Sarah persisted. "I want to know about it."

My aunt looked amused.

Pine, for some reason, was not eager on this point. "I'll send you a booklet that may help you. It is a philosophy, you know. If you could forget about the bombs you might be able to get at it. I'm not big

enough to explain it. I wish you could listen to Anna Jassard."

"I should like to," Sarah admitted.

"You mean," I interposed, "that the bombs are not part of the philosophy."

"Precisely. The bombs are not by any means as much associated with Anarchism as your electric chair is associated with your philosophy—that is, with your system."

"My system. . . .?"

"Of course I mean the existing system. I should hardly wish to accuse you of it. Actually"—and Pine swept us with an exalted glance—"Anarchism in its essence belongs in the realm of pure poetry."

"Well," remarked my aunt, "I've run upon some poetry . . ."

"Inevitably!" Pine exclaimed. "You would, naturally. Nevertheless, absolutely *free* poetry, and consequently utterly pure poetry—which is what I should wish you to think of—would carry you to the point of union, carry you straight to the incandescent heart of perfect beauty."

"And yet," I put forward, "poetry must have a language, and if it has a language it must have laws of some kind—some accepted code by which it is to be understood. There can be no language without law."

Pine shook his head vehemently. "Beauty knows no law." It was as if he shook off all responsibility.

"It always seems to me," I said, "as if the Anarchist wanted to get up-stairs without using steps."

Pine was looking intently at Sarah. "Don't make me explain Anarchism," he said, grimly. "Some of us might get into a row. And I'm not a combative person. I guess I'm a passive Anarchist. I'm letting it come—like the dawn, or spring. You know, I hate arguing, and one can't explain without arguing."

"Perhaps," said Sarah, "we should have kept still until you were through."

"And then have jumped on you in an orderly unison," I suggested.

"I shouldn't have jumped," Sarah said. "I just wanted to know . . ."

"I once wrote a thing," said Pine, "which I called 'The Anarch Speaks.' It was printed in an honest magazine. If I can find a copy I shall send it to you, along with the booklet. But now—now, if you please, we shall talk about anything else you like."

He became eager-looking again.

"There are so many things to talk about. Such astounding things are happening in art and in music. Oh, by the way—have you heard about Laura Sherrick?"

"No," Sarah answered, blankly.

"Disappeared. Completely. Vanished like the notes of my Sanskrit legend."

"I don't understand," Sarah said, her blank look going to white.

"All of a sudden there is no Laura Sherrick. Miss Bransol tells me she left a note saying that she was going away and didn't know when she would be back. Having some human curiosity, I called up the Ardney office, where, as you know, she has been an imposing secretary person, and they said she was no longer with them. And there you are. Curious, isn't it? I thought perhaps you might have some explanation."

"We have been away," said Sarah, in a gray voice.

"Laura is such a level individual," pursued Pine, "that one can't fancy anything flighty about her—of course I'm not being flippant about *flight*. I mean that one doesn't look to her to be grotesque or sensational. She doesn't do funny things. She has too good a sense of humor."

"Has this happened within a week?" my aunt asked, narrowly.

Apparently Pine saw nothing subtle in the question. "I have no idea when she went. I heard of it just before New-Year's Day. I suppose she will enlighten our ignorance when she is ready."

There was more to Pine's visit—too much more—including an impulsive decision to go to the piano. He played with what seemed to me like astounding dexterity, and with an amount of feeling which we might have translated better at another time. He wanted to illustrate some corollary between verse and musical notation. It may be that he got our silence as rapt infatuation. I couldn't tell. I was thinking of Laura Sherrick . . . and Rudley. Both disappearing at about the same time.

Perhaps Rudley really is on the high seas.

Perhaps Laura Sherrick is somewhere else. . . .

One has to have passports. There is a huge intricacy about getting across at this time.

One is never likely to guess such things rightly. In all probability this guess is absurd.

But what difference does it make? We have closed that book.

## VI

Theoretically we should have distrusted Pine—as a matter of association. Laura Sherrick had brought us together. She had approved him, extolled him. Surely this was a fair basis for prejudice.

Yet Sarah, by whatever process, if there was a process (though of course this is the most unlikely thing in the world), not only gave no sign of disliking him in the first uneventful moments of that call, but has since shown quite plainly that she is not letting the shadow of the absconding common friend disturb her impression of the poet. If this is not a fact it will be necessary to conclude that she has decided to pretend that it is. There may be a sort of irony in her feeling. I suspect

that women are often ironical in such situations, that they can get a gratification from exploiting the obviously wrong man. Not merely for any effect on others, nor simply in defiance of circumstances, but in obedience to some instinct for affronting their own inner sense of natural obligation—having fun with their consciences.

Probably she takes Pine as I fancy she took his "Desire of Love," in a strictly objective way, as something you might poke with a stick and examine without peril of contamination.

I wish I had her easy, feminine indifference to the logic of things.

I wish, too, that I could dislike Pine satisfactorily.

The odd thing is that disliking people simply won't move by logic. It annoyed me to have him ask me (over the despised telephone) to go with him to a meeting at Cooper Union. But I couldn't dislike him enough not to go. Moreover, if I have tried closing some doors I want much to open others. I have said to myself that I shall—that I must—nowhere turn aside from men; that if it is the common joke to look for "life" at Pink Poodles, in cabarets, or in attic junk-shops, the alternative is not to crawl about on a track like a trolley-car. The alternative to a joke need not be a stupidity. And alternatives themselves are a joke. The Pink Poodle may be more sensible than one of my Aunt Portia Rowning's Institutions. . . .

Anyway, I went with Pine to the Cooper Union meeting. I went feeling that he was planning to show me Anna Jassard.

But she was not among the speakers. It was a Socialist gathering, as I soon discovered. This made me wonder why Pine was drawn. It turned out that his friend Bruno Fischer, of the profound voice, was to speak about Karl Marx. And a vivid, forceful thing the speech was. A big, hairy man went farther back to Robert Owen. The moderns were taken up by a young

woman with a cloud of black hair and a curious, nervous gesture with her left hand. Her voice was extraordinarily sharp and inflectionless, but something in her earnestness, in her swift, clean-bladed method of cutting her way, had for me a hypnotic force.

There was a contagion, too, in the attention of that audience. I never remember to have seen an audience like that. I didn't have the sense of mass, but of so many individuals, individuals dressed each as himself or herself, and listening as individuals. One got the impression of an absolutely self-generated interest, in being there, and in listening. The attention was not tense; it had a free eagerness.

And yet the applause and the silences were curiously unanimous. A sound of protest or derision, following some irony or arraignment, seemed to sweep like a wind across the crowded hall. It was as if these messages touched the quick of a common desire. . . .

I found myself absorbed in the study of these people, in the frankly attentive faces, in something fundamentally vital, something significant of rooted, generative power honestly responsive. A so-called cultured audience is not like this. In comparison a fashionable audience is a starched mockery.

There is, I suppose, such a thing as class responsiveness; so that rituals, formulas of philosophy, slogans of partizanship, each gathering its group, find their Greek chorus in their own way. The point is that this effect at Cooper Union was not that of a partizan claque.

The lank red-haired man who sprang up, stretching out his hand to ask a question, was no shambler in a herd. He wanted to know something. He made the fact known with a look of being kindled, yet without excitement or awkwardness.

If there was a single unifying sentiment in the meeting, if any unifying desire in that audience was expressed in a single antipathy, one saw that antipathy

objectified in a word held aloft like a bleeding head on a pike—the word “capitalism.”

A thing called “Capitalism” is absorbed in a thing called “War.”

The war cannot be right because capitalism is wrong.

Nations being capitalistic, severally and in common, their wars settle nothing. . . .

“You see,” I whispered to Pine, “some one is to build a world without money. Or if it is right to earn money, it is sinful to have it after you have earned it. In any case the collective work of the state must be done without money, for if the state uses money to build anything or to defend itself it becomes capitalistic. I’m sure there is something better than this, something more affirmative than this, in Socialism. What do you suppose the Socialist *wants?*”

“Why not ask them?” suggested Pine. He appeared suddenly to acquire an immense interest in having an answer. He repeated his suggestion. “Ask them?”

I shook my head.

“May I do it?”

“If you like,” I assented, innocently.

Pine was up at the first available moment.

“An entirely respectful member of this audience,” he said, “has asked me a question which I do not feel competent to answer. He has said to me, ‘What do Socialists want?’ That seems to me a reasonable question. Perhaps some one may feel inclined to answer it.”

“By the chairman’s permission I will try to answer it,” said the young woman with the black hair, stepping forward to the edge of the platform and searching me out.

There fell one of those theatrical stillnesses.

“Socialism has had a thousand, maybe ten thousand, definitions. Yet what Socialists want is simple enough. That does not make it easy to describe that want.

Gravitation or electrolysis is simple, too." But they are not easy to describe. However . . . I was appalled by the steady earnestness of her advance . . . "I think we may say that the Socialist wants *applied* brotherhood. Not merely brotherhood talk, but brotherhood *practice*—not merely a sentiment or even a system, but a *life* expressing brotherhood. I think we may say that the Socialist wants co-ordinated liberty, opportunity safeguarded by true equality, a fruit of labor assured by a common glory of labor, peace assured by common need and common cause, happiness not as a private gift, but as a public blessing."

She spoke these rhetorical sentences with no rhetorical effect whatever. It was amazing to me that they should not sound declamatory. It seemed quite inevitable that she should speak precisely as she did.

"The Socialist wants" . . . she added another passage with a pause after the first words . . . "the Socialist wants to see the barriers of special privilege brushed away; to see all mankind endowed not only with the name of liberty, but with the means of liberty; to see the world washed clean of the blood of conflict; to see a garden and garden ethics where a jungle and jungle ethics have prevailed since the world began; to see all humanity come into humanity's natural inheritance and the ugliness of organized cruelty displaced by the beauty of universal justice."

A moment's silence was followed by a sharp burst of applause and more than one "Good!" or "Bravo!"

Scores of eyes seemed to be asking of me, "Are you satisfied?" "Does this tell you what you wanted to know?" . . . So that it was scarcely startling to have that girl with her passionately dark eyes—she still stood at the edge of the platform—ask me, pointedly and quietly:

"Have I in any way made it clear. . . .?"

I stood up, quaking a bit, and nursing a disgust of Pine.



"Thank you," I said. "You have stated the matter very beautifully—"

"I wasn't trying to be beautiful," she returned, as if with some resentment.

"I know," said I. "But it was beautiful, just the same. I hope you will not resent my saying that all honestly expressed enthusiasms are on the way to being beautiful. You have stated a creed. You have painted an ideal. If I may be permitted to say so—"

"You are permitted to say anything that comes into your head," rumbled Fischer's voice.

"—the ideal you have painted is one to which I think a great many people who do not call themselves Socialists might find it not very difficult to subscribe. It is, I take it, not an ideal that would have appealed to the late Nietzsche. And because you were telling me what Socialists want and not how they propose to get it, you haven't needed to explain the means. It is possible, I suppose, that Socialists are not unanimous as to the means. Nevertheless, though you haven't asked me, I do want to say that as an ideal it seems to me to resemble remarkably the ideals held by many sects of earnest men and women who are pushing forward behind other banners. The chief importance of that resemblance, if I may be permitted—"

"Go ahead!" cried a chorus of voices.

"—the chief importance of that resemblance, to a man looking on, is one that has been remarked a great many times. I mean that it suggests how often conflict in the world comes not from differing ideals, but from a differing sense of methods in reaching them."

"But you can't separate methods from what you call ideals," exclaimed the man with the red hair.

"We've got to eat in the mean time," bawled a big voice behind me.

"Yes," I said, "eating in the mean time—that's the great point—the point of separation, the point of mis-

understanding, the bloody point. At least that's the way it looks to me. And it's a tremendously important point."

"Bet your life!" murmured a girl seated near by.

"I just want to add that if an ideal is a destination, and if sought destinations are not far apart—if, in fact, they so often seem to be the same place—it's a pity this is not more commonly recognized. It's a pity not only because it might reduce conflict, but because it might make each of us a little less cocky about the indispensableness of our own method—our own road."

"Put it a little plainer," piped up a voice from somewhere.

"I don't know that I can," I protested. "I never spoke at a public meeting in my life . . ."

"The lad's all right!" shouted another voice.

"What I mean is this: Humanity is sick. No question about that. His temperature is away above normal (though that's one of the foolishhest words in the dictionary), you hear him raving a lot, and he is in a bad way altogether. Around him are a bunch of doctors—the old-school Autocracy doctor, the newer-school Democracy doctor, the Anarchist doctor, the I. W. W. doctor, the Socialist doctor, the Single Tax doctor, and God knows how many more, and each of them is saying, 'I can cure him—if *I have complete charge of the case.*' Poor Humanity is too sick to make a decision. He thinks he wants to be left alone. And the only chance for any of the doctors to prove his theory is for all the others voluntarily to go away—which they won't do."

There was a crisp murmur, which might have been mostly of protest. I couldn't tell. I could only hear at the end of it the roar of the man with the red hair—

"What sort of doctor are you?"

The murmur was now of laughter—and the platform girl was still looking squarely in my direction. But I felt obliged to face the red hair.

At this Pine sprang up.

"Perhaps" . . . he spoke quietly, but with that odd sort of distinctness . . . "perhaps he isn't one of the doctors. Perhaps he is only that poor devil, Humanity."

I regretted the crutch handed to me in this way, even if Pine seemed to have done very well.

"In that case," I said to the girl on the platform, "Humanity thanks you."

The pair of us sat down, I with a sense of feverishness about the neck. . . .

## VII

There was more of it, but I am writing only the part that has most affected my own emotions and my own studies, for the encounter with Fischer after the meeting, and much of short-range talk with other individuals of the group, gave me no more than an accentuation of the feeling already clearly known to me—the feeling that I am to be recognized as living in the outer darkness and that I am not at all fitted to be a torch-bearer.

Pine explained in the course of our walk up Fourth Avenue that he had not suggested that Sarah go with us because sometimes such meetings were "rather rough."

"Or maybe," he added, "I should say rather high-spirited. Not that I think your sister is a fragile creature. At the same time . . ."

"Of course," I assented.

"Really she would find an Anarchist meeting much less likely to become boisterous. Vehement, naturally. An absolute splendor of conviction—sometimes a blast-furnace flame. But they have the clear-shining vision. And it holds them high and steady."

"I'm beginning to see," I said, "that the visions are all pretty much alike. I'm a trifle discouraged. I believed that if men happened to have the same sense of destination things might go very well. But they spend their whole time fighting on the road. It's pitiful."

"But the fighting on the road is the very thing the Anarchist objects to," insisted Pine. "The very thing. The creed of the Anarchist is the one creed that stands out as most definitely *not* to be translated into terms of violence. The mildest Socialism, for example, that ever was invented would look violent beside Anarchism."

He made a gesture implying something of an exalted tranquillity.

"Evidently," I said, "you're talking about the Anarchists' dream, just as our friend on the platform was talking about the Socialists' dream. These dreams are very handsome. You might prove that, as compared with being carried along on a rose-colored cloud, even the softest hair mattress was relatively violent. But the affair on the road to these things is precisely what we all are interested in. I haven't been able to see that you Anarchists are not as willing as any others to fight on the road. You certainly have sounded like it—quite without regard to the nitroglycerin."

Pine laughed and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Grayl, I'm only just beginning to realize your control at that meeting. I can see now that you would like to have ripped them up."

I protested that I was not a ripper, but that it was irritating to find that people are neither unified nor separated by their dreams; that desires, which they don't understand at all, are not really translated into dreams, but into conflict.

"Take yourself, Pine," it suddenly occurred to me to thrust at him, "what is *your* dominating desire?"

He waited long enough to make a choice between different ways of putting it, his face turned upward.

"You know," he said, "I was born on a farm—in Iowa—and ever since I was a boy on that farm, working more hours than would now fit into a day, and poring far into the night over books of poetry, I have wanted to be somewhere that was not in the least like a farm;

and, now that I have been fifteen years in a city, I don't want it to be in the least like fire-escapes, either. I should like it to be a soft, indolent place, without weather, and gorgeously colored. In it there would be a retreat, very simple, but exquisitely made, like one of those lacy Japanese things carved out of ivory. There would be a vast, an absurdly big, fireplace shedding a slanting, tremulous light over furry rugs, tapestries stained by the fingers of history, divans over which a surf of pillows broke in gorgeous mellow tones like lapis lazuli and jasper. Where the player could see the hearth out of the corner of his eye, and look straight into the sunset through a lattice window, I should have a piano of rose-wood inlaid with silver. I have seen the day when I should have wanted incense and a suit of rusty armor. But of course we get past those things. And then" . . . Here his voice took on a quality that recalled a certain poem . . . "Then I should want the one girl, whom I should never completely understand, but who would understand all that I understood, and love all that I loved; who would be my audience and my fame; who for me would forever express the living essence of dreams; who would incarnate all images of charm, personify that perfection of peace which is the proof of beauty and give the last and eternal definition to love."

He made a gesture toward the stars.

And I laughed.

The turn of his head interrogated me. But there are some laughs one never can successfully explain.

I fancy I was thinking mostly of his apparent contentment with a kind of maudlin remoteness in his vision, as if it were not the desire of a situation, but of a picture that was working in him . . . a picture that might without a pang be turned face to the wall as something to be potted over again.

I was thinking, too, that I am my sister's brother, and that Pine might have made his sketch with a freer

hand under other circumstances. However, having heard his "Desire of Love," I was abundantly supplied with possible details.

In the end I knew that my laugh had simply reacted to the disproportionate. Pine's earthly heaven was funny on Fourth Avenue. And his "one girl" became rather confused as a vision by seeming rather plural. Then there was the irony of Laura Sherrick . . . crowning him with compliments. Not to speak of a distortion introduced by the idea of Sarah.

So that you might say that Pine had been quite as absurd in his own way as a certain other person in his talk about Felicia.

#### VIII

Felicia, by the way, knits more devotedly than ever—at the window. Which reminds me that Sarah has begun to knit; and my aunt is, I am sure, meditating resuming her practice of the art. Aunt Paul has intimated that in this field she once acquired a highly specialized dexterity. She exhibits the reserve of an old knitter.

Within the last few days my aunt and Sarah have had the services of a dressmaker—a nervous, angular, German woman in whose presence it is necessary not by any chance to make any remarks about the war. It appears that she is rather a remarkable dressmaker, with a record of some service at Clarette's, in Paris; that her dress ideas are not at all German; and that she worked with a preternatural rapidity, which may be mere nervousness, but which is held to have an important bearing on the bills. Mrs. Shrecker has a voice that is penetrating even in its whispers. Thus when I happened to pass the door of the room in which she was in consultation with Sarah and my aunt over thickets of dress goods, the words trailed after me, "I have a nephew who is a cripple like that . . ."

My aunt pursues invisible activities with regard to suffrage, which she tells me is to be wrested from New York State this year. These activities are never made very clear, but it is true that she has a settled, easy, smooth-running busyness that would in any case need neither publicity nor approval. She is strong, too, for Single Tax. If she lauds suffrage and Single Tax (she pronounces it with capitals) she will experience that superior joy possible only to a woman with a sister-in-law. I am sure that she expects any triumph for suffrage, in particular, utterly to blight Portia Masterton Rowning.

It is hard to fancy anything as withering my aunt Portia. One has the feeling that if anything hit my aunt Portia, even suffrage, it would receive some injury from the impact. I am sure that Aunt Paul did not take up suffrage with any malice. But I am suspicious about the Single Tax. Her brother's formidable wife has an overbearing scorn with regard to Single Tax—a kind of upholstered truculence—that would tend to make any ordinary person rather sympathetic toward the issue, if it did not incite an open allegiance.

It is because my aunt is to preside at something that the seamstress has been here, to leap whenever the parrot utters one of those playful trial notes, and to enforce non-military conversation.

One day, indeed, something was said about the war and in an instant the talk was afire. From one innocent inevitable word to another the flame jumped until Mrs. Shrecker burst out, like the back-draught of a furnace, with a tirade of hysterical denunciation of the whole non-German world. Sarah told me that her face became dreadful to look at during the moments of that red anger. Her sharp quivering voice broke at last in tears.

*"Ach Gott! Such devil English, and such heepocrite, money-grab Americans!—making guns my brothers to kill!"*

It must have been painful, and must have called for all of my aunt's ingenuity. Seemingly diplomatic relations with a good seamstress are not lightly to be broken off.

Mrs. Shrecker's husband is a baker, working somewhere in Third Avenue. She has three brothers in Germany—all in the war. A fourth brother is an American marine at Norfolk. There is something fearfully earnest about those full eyes, which have a fever of energy in them, and her bruised smile comes with an effect of utter kindness. Leave out the question of Germany, and Mrs. Shrecker is a pleasant, quick-stepping part of our scheme of things—like some millions more in the same situation. Life continues to be largely a matter of leaving out questions.

I asked Alonzo to-day what he thought about the war—his devotion to extras gave a pertinence to the inquiry.

Usually Alonzo seems like a part of the switchboard or the elevator. It was not until I met him one evening walking beside a little, completely black girl, with teeth even whiter than his, and acquired a sense of his smart style of stepping and man-about-town air, that I began to separate him as a person. His face is commonly of a singular blankness, unassembled, as if he were not merely imperfectly awake, but as if his astral self were in some far place. When he accepts mental contact, as in the case of my question, his face twitches, stirs, becomes human, and then goes through an astonishing process of unfolding, and unfolding to a point of grotesque transformation, recalling one of those examples of hastened tadpole evolution in the movies.

"Looks like *we'll* have to go over and lick 'em, Mr. Grayl."

This was Alonzo's summing up of the war situation. It was as American as if he had been of quite another color.



"But war hurts, Alonzo."

"Hurts?" Alonzo's grin twisted over the word.

"Well, y' know what Sherman said. I guess it is."

"But how would you feel . . .?"

"Oh, I'd go! I'd like to git out. I'd go quick. I got a cousin in a colored regiment. He's some nigger, too."

"And when you come back. . . .?"

"I'm thinkin' about bein' a shofer."

The road is quite clear to Alonzo. He will perhaps be a soldier in a snappy khaki suit; and come back, and be a chauffeur, and marry the little very black girl. This and a lot more he has dreamed out in those stupid empty half-hours at the switchboard. But first, above and before all, I am sure that he would like to "git out." His desire doesn't run a great way on the road.

It is different with a boy I met at the cobbler's. He is the cobbler's son—married last year, and working in a clothing factory. He was seated beside his father when I went in. I had the feeling that they had been talking earnestly, for the father's face as he stood up wore a left-over expression of gravity.

The father I had talked with before, about Wales, and the town of Aberystwyth, where he was born. He has a fine head. There is a grizzled sadness about his look.

When he had wrapped up the shoes I had left to be mended he asked me, intently, "Do you think we'll go into the war?"

Our discussion was as blind as all such discussions have to be, and was, I suppose, just like any other, save that when the boy joined in there came a special flavor of something that had gone before. I knew now what they had been talking about.

The son spoke heatedly, with a curious boyish fury, the father's face turned fully toward him whenever he spoke. He wanted something quick and crushing to be

done with regard to Germany. It was as if he wished to do the whole thing himself.

"I tell the old man," he said, "that it ain't England that's getting the dirty end. We're getting it. Ain't that so? Us spit on and laughed at by the Germans, and the whole bunch of the Allies is sore on us. It's rotten. I always said—away back to the *Lusitania* . . ."

"Wait a minute," said the father. "Wait a minute . . ."

Presently old Drynd put before me the thing that was in the back of his mind. "You'd think, to hear him, that he didn't have a young wife and baby. I tell him he better not bother his brains about the war. A wife and a baby. And the baby sick. What can *he* do? What can *I* do? My wife can't even come out now when the door rings. Six months with the rheumatism. In bed some days. What good is it for *us* to talk about war? I leave it to you."

Young Drynd evidently regarded this as bad form.

"What's the use of talking?" he protested. "I ain't handing you a gun and pushing you out, am I? You don't see me enlisting, do you? New York ain't in the war yet. I'm just tellin' you. It looks rotten to me. How do we know what's comin'? I only said I'd like to be in the push, and pop gets in a stew about it."

The elder Drynd directed his gray face to me. "He's always been restless. War seems to make them more so. I hope it's nearly over . . ."

At this point a painted girl came in, clapping the door shut behind her.

As I gathered up my package she flung down a pair of shoes she had carried under her cloak.

"For Gawd's sake! old man," she said to Drynd, "what do you think you did with them shoes? They busted again in three **days**." She turned to me as I reached for the door-knob, smiling. "Say, these war times is hell, ain't they?"

## IX

When I found a note from Zorn asking me to see him, "at my convenience," I went at once to his door. This was yesterday in the middle of the afternoon.

A tingle of something that was more than curiosity urged a quick response. I felt an eagerness I should not have known how to explain.

In the length of the pause after the pressure on the bell-button I concluded that he was absent. But at last he opened the door, in a peremptory way, as if rebuking the author of the summons.

"Come in!" he said, still with a kind of peremptoriness, though I fancied that I had seen a relaxing of his aggressive outline when it became apparent who his caller was. And he plunged ahead through the passage, leaving me to close the door and follow him.

I had a sense of his isolation in the apartment, now that both Rudley and Stokes had gone. The effect was gloomy, pathetic. A place like that acquires almost a tragic absurdity with a single figure in it.

He did not look toward me when I reached the sitting-room. He stood beside the table, his face turned toward the windows, an absent look in his eyes.

"I wanted to talk with you," he said, leaving me to infer, if I had cared to do so, that we were to talk standing in the middle of the room.

"You see . . . there is no one else."

This might have justified a tone of desperation. In fact, it was simply ruminative. It was followed by a decision to go and find one of his snub-nosed cigars. He came back vaguely through smoke, and in the first pause, while still but imperfectly visible through the sudden cloud, he asked me to sit down. He himself moved to and fro in the room several times before swinging about to ask:

"Did you ever hate anybody?"

To this ominous challenge I could answer only that I rather thought I never had. I went further to say that if I ever had thought of the matter at all it was to conclude that I was not a very good hater.

Zorn looked narrowly at the cigar.

"Very likely," he said, "you would conclude that hating is undesirable. But that would make no difference. If you had to hate you would hate. Hating doesn't go by reason or formula."

"Maybe it is like love," I suggested.

"They have figured out that the power to love and the power to hate go together. A crazy theory, invented obviously by a hater. But I believe hate is like love in its way of happening. We think in both cases that there is a reason. There is a cause, but there isn't a reason."

This was perhaps profound, and, coming from Zorn, it had an impressiveness which it would be very hard to describe. But it didn't explain why I had been summoned.

"I think," said Zorn, "that I came close to hating in one or two instances. There was a man who persistently hounded a woman—a very devil of a man, completely evil. You might have said that he had been made to be hated. He personified everything we should hate. I had the feeling that it was a duty to hate him, though I knew that he simply had something wrong with his brain, or that maybe his soul had been mangled in its birth into the body. But I never got much farther than a nausea of dislike. I despised him bitterly. Yet hate . . . no, I don't think I got to that. . . . And then there was a woman—a woman with the face of a highly educated angel and a nature such as Satan might have used for an immensely intricate job. I might have . . . married her if God and Satan had happened to be in partnership. Well, it came about that circumstances in which I was not connected moved to reveal her—utterly, as if lightning had slanted through her, and sud-

denly you knew every horrible fiber. If I had hated her it would not have been because of what I had escaped, nor because of what she did to me. It would not have been because of what she did to others. It would have been because of what she *was*. She belonged to the to-be-hated. . . . But I'm not a hater. I'm sure of that."

He gave a single suck at the cigar, then added:

"And yet I'm not at all sure that hating isn't good for a person—that a natural, spontaneous hatred may not carry a stimulation, accentuating our affections. If the thing went by reason perhaps we ought to cultivate a reasonable assortment of hatreds. I have no doubt there are people who are kindled by them. . . . But I don't ask you to be a hater. I'm glad you are not."

"If you were my father confessor," I said, "I might have to admit one exception, one tendency or whatever you would call it."

"One hatred?"

"One nebulous influence. If I ever hated any one I think it would be the one who broke my back."

"Good God!" Zorn suspended the hand holding the black cigar and stared at me with an expression of horror.

"The one . . . Do you know?"

I shook my head.

"You don't know . . ."

He seated himself in a tentative, faltering way in a chair opposite mine.

"You don't know, and you have been . . ."

"I haven't hated. How could I? I haven't known whom to hate. And I haven't wished to know. . . . Some hired person, probably. In fact, I have an echo-impression of a tradition, if you might call it that—something out of early childhood before such things began not to be mentioned any more—that some caretaker dropped me. It happens very often."

"But"—Zorn's Adam's apple moved convulsively—

"but think for a moment . . . think of the chance—God! You must never let that grow into a hatred—even if you never knew the one. Why," and he swayed protestingly toward me, "it might have been some one who loved you—who was very near to you—it might have been that splendid aunt of yours, for example."

"Yes," I admitted, "it might have been my aunt. Of course. Perfectly nice people have dropped babies. Nevertheless, I don't think it was my aunt. She has a way with her hand that . . . that makes me think she didn't do it."

Zorn had the look of being appalled at the thought of such an analysis. It halted him for a moment. Then he made as if to offer the supreme protest.

"But think, my son—think, and forever forget the whole matter—can't you see that you *must* forget?—that it might have been your mother?"

"Yes," I said. "I have thought of that—even of that. I admit that it was a deterrent—that it pushed me away from the foolishness of thoughts about hating. A cripple who wasn't bent on slow suicide wouldn't . . ."

"Yes, yes! I know. You are wise. You are a sublime rebuke." As if noticing that this was by way of being disconcerting, he added: "It is plain enough that you have been patient. And you will understand and forgive my interest, though you may not have guessed why we came to this subject. If I hadn't seen your home I might have asked you in the first place quite another question. I might have asked you whether you could understand a father's hatred of his children."

This, I thought, might be hard to understand unless one had been brought up to believe in a God who could hate.

"Or had lost sight of God altogether," Zorn added. "In this case I think that was the way of it."

"In this case. . . ?"

"The case I'm going to tell you about."

So that now I was to get the thing I had been called to hear.

"I went into it for the boy's sake," said Zorn, turning to the windows. "I thought it would mean something to him. It will mean something to him . . . when he gets it. If he has to die he will be dying with a different feeling, and some of those who are left behind will be living with a different feeling."

The cigar had gone cold. Zorn lighted it again, blowing the smoke upward as if to keep me in sight.

Then came the whole Rudley story. Not consecutively, but in the Zorn way, with strange parenthetical outbursts. As, for example, where he was talking about the brains of this extraordinary father as he had analyzed him.

"You know, once in a while a man is born like that. I suppose his sort used to be born oftener, and in other civilizations. I can't make him seem American. Not merely because he was brutal or selfish. There is no nationality in brutality and selfishness. But evidently he had that frightful parental egotism, that head-of-the-house egotism that seems more European than American. In an American it has a way of looking comic. It never had that look in him. A strange survival . . . or maybe you would say a reversion. Yet I don't think it was a disease of vanity, as parental brutality so often is. No. It was incidental to an instinct for domination, a bull-necked, bellowing kind of domination when he erupted. Perhaps a worse kind when he wasn't erupting.

"Mind you, I have never seen Wendell Rudley, but I can visualize him perfectly. He is as clear to me as Robert himself—a big, square-headed man with hard gray eyes, and fists. He has a piece of machinery where other men have a brain, a wonderful piece of machinery, and as capable of sentiment as a machine. We are in the habit of thinking that a man has to have imagination to succeed in business, to succeed in anything. If

Wendell Rudley has imagination it is a kind never measured or accounted for. He does what he does with sheer driving power. He bulls through because he *hasn't* the imagination that holds other men back from certain things. He has a rough-shod brain. Nothing really annoys him but being retarded. He has a blind spot at the point where other men would see scowls. I suppose he must have a deaf spot to go with it.

"You know, there are men who have neither sensitiveness nor imagination for others but who have vanity. You can get hold of such men. They can be trapped finally. But this man has no vanity. I'm sure of that. When you meet a man who has neither sensitiveness nor a vanity point you are beaten before you begin."

Zorn swung his hand hopelessly.

"Imagine such a man a father. Imagining him a husband simply brings up a very old picture. The poor creature married to him can even get a sort of grace out of it. The worse he is the more she may shine, in a white martyrdom dear to those who revel in saints. But children—American children!—men and women who are to go out from him. Think of them! It is horrible! . . . horrible!"

A real horror was in Zorn's face as if he were seeing much more than he had painted.

"As a matter of fact, this man's wife was a superior woman." His eyes rested for an instant on that picture between the windows. "Naturally the testimony of a son is biased. But it is plain enough that she had a fine-grained power in her. The father couldn't prevent the putting of that power into her children. The one who does the borning has a wonderful advantage, after all. And he was too busy plunging through the world to pay much attention to his children at the beginning . . . except that occasionally he burst into the process of rearing them to insist that they must be vigorous. He



was fond of saying that he wanted healthy live animals in his house. There was to be no mush or foolishness—no flabby Sunday-school stuff. This applied to the girl as well as to the boy. In some ways, perhaps, particularly to the girl. He had a Spartan theory about sports, for instance. He himself gave little personal attention to sport. The only games that caught him were boxing and cards. When Robert was seventeen his father 'took him on' with the gloves. It gave the father a chuckling delight, evidently, to break the boy's arm. Yet he was as much delighted to have the boy swing angrily with the arm that wasn't broken and knock out two of his parent's teeth.

"Well, while the mother lived she was there to intercede, as mothers will, between father and children. And, as I say, he was much absorbed in his affairs, which grew larger by great leaps. He was fond of taking chances, and seemed always to win. It made no difference whether it was a Legislature or a wheat-pit. I think he must have wished there was some way in which he could gamble with the children. In the matter of them he insisted that the mother's system was all wrong. He was particularly brutal in his emphasis on this point. There was no kind of insult he didn't invent. When the mother died, which she did before the boy was through with college, and while the girl was in the beginning stages, he undertook to apply his principles in person, spasmodically, violently, in intervals when his plunging came to any pause. Wendell Rudley regulates everything with a club, in a sudden way, when he happens to feel expressive. That machine brain of his doesn't strike like a clock. Its convulsions come irregularly, like those intermittent seizures. . . ."

The word carried me back to that night of "the man with the glove."

"Naturally he bedeviled the children. He couldn't break their spirit. Children of such a mother and such

a father are not easily cowed. They might be battered, though they couldn't readily be crushed altogether. Humanity is astonishingly resilient. But he made them hate him. If he had gone about it with a scientific system, step by step, with attention to every meticulous detail of the business of creating hatred, he couldn't have succeeded so perfectly. If he had staked everything on the chance of making them hate him, even he, with all his luck, couldn't have won with more ghastly completeness. He made an absolutely perfect job of it. I can assure you of that.

"He lost the girl first. I mean that she was the first to hate him. He bullied her in ways that were all the more exasperating because he didn't stop the money. Somehow I fancy that is distinctively American. About the last thing an American father will do, if resources in themselves are not an issue with him, is stop the money. Besides, she had a little money of her own—from an aunt—and he could scarcely have used the money whip over her.

"If the son died harder it was because he had more fight. I don't mean more spirit. I mean just that—more fight. And that mental struggle between father and son was a bitter affair. As for Robert, his father could of course simply have chucked him out. But that was not his way of winning. It would have been like tossing the cards on the floor. He wanted Robert in his own business. Robert wanted engineering. They haggled and bickered. There were long intervals in which the father was absent in the West. During these times the son went straight forward with his own plans. Presently he was at his technical studies. It was then, too, that he began gambling."

Zorn gave me a look as if in curiosity as to any knowledge I might have of Rudley's history.

"He told me about that," I said.

"About . . ."

"About the gambling."

"A man comes naturally by his father's instincts," Zorn went on, "but if he has the living example of his father's excesses then excesses of the same sort are about the last things he has a right to excuse himself for. I'm not thinking of gambling as a pleasure, but as a passion, a mania. You may say that Robert might not have recognized in his gambling the likeness to his father's form of gambling. You may say, too, that if he had he might have remarked that his father was a wonderful winner. The truth is that he didn't do much thinking about it. And there isn't much in modern life to make a youngster think of gambling as a vice. God knows it's one of our most familiar indoor sports. But Robert went farther than any social madness. He became a gambling-house fanatic."

"I know," I said. The story was not gripping me at all, though Zorn's flushed earnestness was an absorbing spectacle.

Yet he brought me up suddenly by his next bit of the narrative.

"Then came the encounter with the beast Waincrove."

It has seemed odd to me that I didn't guess Zorn's progress toward that fantastic trip to the Naugaway Valley.

X

Thus I happened at last to get the story of Rudley's home-town catastrophe. My irritation in the matter of Rudley had the effect of distorting the images of an entirely plausible tale; so that one image and another came jerking out of the mess, grotesquely and as if the thing had been quite different from the simple cause-and-effect affair it really was. At this moment it is to me a jumble from which Rudley might emerge as very heroic and superior if one were in a position to take this incident objectively.

Naturally I can't quite do that. I could watch Zorn unfold his case, fervidly—and caustically, when that seemed to suit him—yet hold back. I realize now that as a result of my skepticism there are one or two links I can't find. It isn't clear, for example, just how Rudley became the champion of Biff Hannigan in this precious row.

Zorn made that encounter with Waincrove very vivid. I can see Robert standing before that arrogant confrère of the elder Rudley and urging, with much too little of diplomacy, the withdrawal of the threat against Hannigan. This threat was based on an accusation that involved Waincrove's daughter, with how much seriousness doesn't matter. Zorn believes that an enmity to Biff's father had much to do with the sinister vehemence of the threat. The elder Hannigan being then under the first attack of a disease that finally carried him off, the indomitable Biff was in no position to invite an open row. Hence, by whatever interior logic, Rudley's intercession. Yet the very need of silence only accelerated old Waincrove's animosity. He was soon shaking his fist in Rudley's face.

This much Rudley managed to bear very well. But when Waincrove, berating his daughter's reckless pretensions to independence, slightly coupled her name with that of Rudley's sister, Rudley (with Zorn's post-facto blessing) lost his temper. There were nasty words, a stroke of the hand by Waincrove, and Rudley felt obliged to knock him down.

The upshot of it was that Waincrove gave it out the next day that he had trounced Rudley for insulting his daughter.

Malignity like that would consider nothing. Probably it never considered the need to follow the thing through with Rudley's father. Certainly it ignored the daughter and every other personal consequence.

That Rudley might not seem too absurd a fanatic

Zorn made it out that Hannigan's champion was content to laugh at the first whisper of the story. And Zorn was also inclined to accept a theory that Hannigan did not, at the time, appreciate the situation in which Rudley was to be placed. In fact, as Zorn admitted, the whole affair actually had no greater dimensions than a village squabble. No one could have foreseen the feeling that would grow from this poisoned seed, mostly because no one could have foreseen the fostering effect of ugly stories about Rudley's gaming exploits, nor how dramatically Wendell Rudley was to co-operate in pitching his son into the outer muddle of things.

"That last night at the Rudley place," said Zorn, "must have been bitter. The three were there—father, son, and daughter—the daughter, as I have told you, already hating the father, with as good cause as I suppose hatred ever could have. There was a scene of the blighting sort which Wendell Rudley ended with two words, 'Get out!'

"This was to the son. But the daughter snatched them up. She didn't act as promptly as the boy. But she went away a week or so later. She had that little money of her own. The Waincrove girl went with her."

Zorn gave me a look that seemed to imply that I need not now be told why he went on that stealthy pilgrimage.

"I knew Robert would be going away. I knew what was fermenting in him. He has an obstinate streak. Very likely he would call it persistence. Perhaps obstinacy is the other chap's persistence. When he cut me short on the question of clearing up this thing I told him just how devilishly obstinate I thought he was. He said, as to the whole affair, that it didn't matter. He meant that he was contemptuous. So far as that blathering Waincrove is concerned, it was contemptibly small. But it did something to Robert all the same.

Catastrophes are big or little by their reactions. Men are foolish to grin and bear. A good howl is often more potent than any snickering martyrdom. He knocked Waincrove down at the beginning. He should have knocked him down at the end, Hannigan or no Hannigan. It would have had more of sheer righteousness. But no . . . there was his obstinacy again. You can't budge him once he is started on a thing. It will be the same in France. He'll go through . . ."

"I believe you," I said, blankly.

"Of course that Waincrove foolishness was not the cause of the final explosion in the Rudley household. But it was the occasion. And the violence at home had the effect outside of completing the vicious circle. It became quite clear that Robert was a bad lot. And there you come to the fact that accomplished the most hurt. There were people there at Brannington by whom Robert set great store. . . . Particularly there were two women who were close to his mother. He got it into his head that they had joined in chucking him. He was quite emphatic about that with me at the time I wrung a thread of the story from him.

"Well"—Zorn stood up and managed to kindle the remains of his fat cigar—"I'm not deluding myself into believing that you will understand, but I made up my mind to do something that might send him off, when he did go, with a different feeling. He had cut me short with very little. I wanted to know. And I got what I went after."

Zorn shook his hands close to my face.

"I took that Waincrove rascal by the throat—very nearly. The odd thing is that it wasn't necessary. Not at all. He was quite meek—and astonished—a stolid brute of a man. It was enough that he quite shamelessly told me the truth. I made him write it down and sign it. After he had done it the fool was less meek—wondered, I've no doubt, whether he hadn't

put himself in for trouble. Some day I shall get at Wendell Rudley."

It may have been a sense of the way my imagination followed the lines of this possibility that induced Zorn to emphasize the declaration.

"It would be worth a lot of effort. Not for anything that would happen to him. But it would do me good."

"If you got what you went after," I said, reverting to the pilgrimage, "you saw the two women friends of Rudley's mother."

"Not both. One is dead. I was sorry for that. But the other . . . that I assure you was worth while. She was far from having any ill-feeling toward Robert. But she had grieved pitifully. A fine woman, yet she deserved a little shaming. I wasn't sweet with her. I showed her Waincrove's scrawl. I told her what the real Robert *is*. She said she wanted to write to him. I have forwarded her letter—with mine telling him of my offenses. As you may know, he was gone when I got back—gone to participate in the calamity that is growing bigger every minute."

For the moment I was looking at a strangely subdued Zorn. This made it less astonishing that his final word should have been what it was.

"If I had a son I should wish that son to be like him."

And I sat there like a stick, swallowing my perplexities, awed and confused by Zorn's devotion, groping for some reality in the vanished image of Robert Rudley.

It was a relief that Zorn issued no challenge. My silence was, apparently, without offense. Yet I felt the need to speak, even if I couldn't speak of Rudley then. I said the thing that had just come into my mind.

"That is the first time, Mr. Zorn, I've heard you express anything like a wish. Maybe you will let me translate my feeling into a question. I believe every man has his great wish. What is yours?"

Zorn looked at me suspiciously.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Let me answer that question afterward," I urged him. "You have furnished me with the best definition of friendship I ever saw lived. But you won't care to have me tell you that, and I'm not shifting to another subject, though my question might sound so. I guess the thing is all of a piece."

"What is my great wish?" Zorn peered at me with gathered brows. "It sounds foolish."

It might, I said, if he thought wishing was foolish.

"But no man has a single wish."

"May he not have a greatest wish—a dominating wish, a supreme longing?"

Zorn stroked his chin.

"I assume that you mean the thing that in most people amounts simply to an itch."

"You believe Rudley has more than an itch?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. I haven't philosophized about it. By the way," and he gave me that fasten-you-to-the-chair glance, "what is the subject of your book?"

"The title may suggest it—The Great Desire."

"I understand. That is very interesting. You're making notes of me."

"I'm listening and thinking."

"Admirable! Maybe the *modus* of art is an amplified railroad warning: Stop, look, listen—and *say*."

"Except that one must think and feel."

Zorn's eyes roved the room. "Seeing, feeling, expressing—when art rises in all three it is ripe, isn't it? That is a pretty good definition of *living* also. Remember that."

I told him of meeting a newspaper man at the fraternity club who had asked a hundred people, as he met them, what they would do with a million, and had made a newspaper story of the answers. Eighty-eight



per cent. in their first breath had spoken of travel. The vast majority thus showed plainly that they felt *tied*—like Alonzo. To break loose—that was the big impulse. They might differ in their way of coming back. In their longing for liberty they were impressively alike.

“The desire for liberty.” Zorn was musing. “It is tremendously pathetic. For of course it grows out of a delusion—that delusion of being tied.”

I protested that roots are not a delusion.

“In a man—yes. He carries his roots with him.”

“As to that,” I said, “you took a lot of trouble recently to show that it hurts to pull them up.”

He paused for a moment in which he put away the last of the cigar.

“Maybe I have been rootless for too long.”

And I didn’t get the master wish.

## XI

In translating Zorn’s narrative to Sarah and Aunt Paul it was impossible to escape a feeling of disproportion between the cause and the effect. Zorn treated the whole affair as if it were of vast importance. Despite his “catastrophes are big or little by their reactions,” he had seemed to give that muddle in Brannington the dimensions of an actual tragedy. Perhaps it was because I could not translate it with the same flavor that the disparity appeared. Affection has its own yardstick, of course, and one has to remember that the intrinsic in a happening is a mere theory. It is its effect in our minds that we can get at. We are all a good deal like the politicians. We ask, “What is there in this for *me*?” I hope most of us go farther. Whether we do or not, we can’t see around corners. Each must see from his own angle.

Zorn seemed to me to be satisfied with a single line of proof about Rudley. He is ready, evidently, to brush

away every other consideration—not to speak of anything that might be altogether aside from his assumption—such as a Laura Sherrick affair, for example. The short of it is that he thinks he knows Rudley.

I remember his saying one day, when we were discussing another matter—though he may have been thinking of Rudley, “Don’t consider too conclusively a thing a man *does*. Consider what he *is*.”

“But what he does is part of what he is,” I expostulated.

“Ah, yes!—a part. It may even seem to be that. But it is not *him*.”

“That is God’s game,” I persisted, “to know what we *are*. How are we to know men except by what they do—with their thoughts or with their hands? It might be very well to imitate God, to try to get through and find the total of the man. I can understand that this might be not only scientific, not only magnanimous, but reassuring in a vast number of cases—”

“Never mind the science,” said Zorn, sharply. “The plain fact is that one lie doesn’t make a liar—one blunder a blunderer.”

I held out for the point that a man only needs to lean too far over the cliff *once*—that he doesn’t need to make a habit of it.

“But I’m not speaking of *consequences*,” declared Zorn. “I’m speaking of *character*. Your erudition in the matter of consequences is perfect. Gravitation is relentless—and the wretched thing is that social gravitation is just as relentless. Character is another matter. You should have thought of that—”

“But—”

“I know all you are going to say. It is perfectly good as a theory. Christ was not nailed to the cross for what He *was*, but for what He said and did. What we say and do is what *connects* us with others. Very fine—but here’s the proper ‘but’—character is larger than con-

duct, and it is not exclusively God's job to read beyond fragments of conduct when we have the chance to do so. A man is *not* like a chain. He is as strong as his strongest link also. The consequences of a weakness may be tremendous, but the consequences of a strength—in the same man—may be tremendous, too. Is there anything that shines out of history more clearly than that?" . . .

I knew he was right, but when I revert to that plea it is hard to avoid reading in it his personal solicitude for Rudley. It may explain, too, his fearfully solemn attitude toward the Brannington incident.

Nevertheless, I was astonished to have my aunt hear the facts with evident emotion. I couldn't read these emotions. Her one exclamation was as far as she went in words.

"What a pity!"

That was all. Which fact was a pity I wasn't in the mood to ask. Perhaps she feels as I do, that poor Zorn's elaborate vindication of the man who is now across the sea halts rather awkwardly. That is a pity.

As for Sarah, she surprised me quite as much by receiving the story with scarcely a sign of feeling, though her eyes did betray that trick they have of growing deep.

"I never supposed there was much in those stories about him," she said, in that level, wise-woman way. It was as if she had said that nothing mattered but the One Thing. Well, until the One Thing happened we had been, all of us, civil enough to Rudley. In spite of purely theoretical misgivings I had gone on liking him. And Sarah . . . well, who knows about Sarah? I saw the way she looked at him. I saw the way she looked when she closed that door. I watched her as I gave out this story from Zorn. The sum is to be guessed, but knowing about Sarah would be like knowing why her lips make that little turn when she doesn't say something she is thinking.

I came back to Sarah again and again from the pages of my book, as if I must somehow get to the matter of the Woman secret through her. Without something of the woman secret how is one to reach the fundamentals? I don't mean the sex secret—not Sarah as a female, but as a woman. Mere sex has no secrets at all. It has been blabbing since biology had anything to go on. Its utmost tokens litter the earth. The mystery of Woman, on the contrary, seems to escape exposure even by her own best efforts. The enigma has become so trite that even the baffled Other Half forgets to be keen about it until the implements of philosophy break their edges against the grit.

Taking Sarah is not merely a matter of convenience. It would be shameless to take simply the handiest specimen. In that view I might have accepted my aunt as a large, mellowed, richly stratified example. I couldn't feel that my aunt would yield satisfactory results. She seems divergent. That Successfully Single notion has too much the sound of a third sex. No; Sarah is more typical. I'm sure she *might* marry. That is all that is essential to establish a truly typical case.

When Sarah asked me what was the difference between an old maid and a girl bachelor, and I ventured the opinion that an old maid thinks too little of men while a girl bachelor thinks too much of herself, I had in mind a definite theory about which I am not flippant at all.

The theory (I took occasion to remind Sarah that it was, I suppose, very old) is this: That in seeking an understanding of men and women the short cut is in looking for their *interests*—in searching, like the judge, for the *motive*. Self-interest rather than sex separates kinds of action in the sexes. There are polarities and all that sort of thing to explain mere sex attraction and repulsion. Science may figure it out that male and female considerations are very simple. But man and woman considerations are made not in the least simple by the

eternal presence of this self-interest complexity. Women look at things differently not because of their different sex, but because of the different interests growing out of different sex.

Sarah had an easy way of not being involved in this.

"What of it?" she said.

"Why have scales, or a foot-rule, or a thermometer?" I demanded. "We need measuring principles. Do you admit that?"

"I don't see the sense of rushing around measuring things," she said. "I think you measure too much. You look exactly like that to me sometimes—like a comic-page professor with awful spectacles, a foot-rule in one hand, a thermometer in the other, scales sticking out of his pocket, and glaring feverishly at Life."

We both laughed. When Sarah alone laughs the discussion often goes on. But when we both laugh reasoning is at an end.

And when we both laugh Sarah's laugh always looks good to me. She would think I was measuring again if I said so, but few women laugh so well as Sarah. Not only as to the sound, but as to the look of it. I haven't heard Sarah laugh for a long time.

## XII

If I hadn't seen Felicia in the afternoon, on the street, in broad daylight, it might in some ways have been different. Not changed utterly, of course, but changed, nevertheless.

I was on my way home, and had just turned from a glance through the railings of the Square when I saw her coming. She was with the woman whom I have seen at the window.

She became extraordinarily vivid in an instant. Her face shone above the deep brown-fur collar of her cloak with a curious brightness—I don't mean merely animation, though it had a wonderful flash of that, too—but

a radiance of sheer color, like a face you might see lifted in a dim canvas by a special shaft of light. It occurred to me afterward that this effect might have resulted partly from the fact that her velvet hat had no brim to cast a shadow and that she held her face high, as if in special joy of the air, which was very fine to-day. Partly, I say. These things could not altogether explain the exquisitely luminous fairness of her skin, a color which you could, it may be, find in certain orchid petals when they are drenched with sky, but for which there is no possible paint or word in the world.

When we neared each other she turned her head so that I could look fully into her eyes. My thought in that instant was that she was measuring me at close quarters, and I tingled as if some deliciously tenuous current of flame had pranced through my body. Her turning her head was so sudden and so unexpected, and something in her eyes as well as in the curve of her parted lips was so expressive of interest—as if, in fact, she had said, “This, then, is the one who looks from the window”—that my hand (late enough, as luck would have it) mechanically went to my hat, and with a burning face I realized that she had passed.

Her silhouette was still visible when I reached my door. She is not tall, but a pleasant slenderness gives her all the grace that goes with—with pleasant slenderness. In the retreating flicker of her there was the supreme music of line.

With one miracle to fuddle me I might have been better prepared for the other. But even an ingenious imagination—one of those imaginations that can juggle with bubbles or weave patterns with lighting and the skin of mountains—would scarcely have the audacity to drop us down at the same concert on the same evening. As for putting us side by side, so that her rolled-back furs touched my shoulder—that, as a piece of fantasy, would have been absolutely grotesque.

Yet there she was. So close that I could have learned which sort of perfume she preferred if she had preferred any. There was no perfume save that emanation too faint for naming by which we sense a delicious presence. If there are colors no eye can see, and sounds no ear can hear, it is fascinating (as I can testify) to strain the sensory attention in an effort to verify the subtlety of a significant odor. There was, of course, the furry fragment of a wild animal that touched my shoulder. But there was also a whispered odor that I knew was of her hair.

Our household had been unanimous in going to hear the symphony orchestra. My aunt's wisdom in the matter of music makes Sarah and me look illiterate. Her presence is thus a happy help at a concert, especially as she does not intrude her wisdom. If, as in my case, one cares for the most part to guess meanings or intentions for himself, her way of letting others alone is a good trait. If one wishes to ask, "Who was Ambroise Thomas?" she is not too encyclopedic. And of course she never speaks of "nuances" or in any of the funny patter. I have heard her analyze "The Ring" in real man-talk that had a Wagnerian jolt to it.

We sat with my aunt in the middle, so that Sarah and I might have her like a book between us. Two seats on the aisle remained empty beside me almost up to the moment when the conductor took his place.

Then came Felicia and her mother—I'm sure she is her mother.

The realization of what had happened, that she was there, settling down immediately beside me in the amber glow, loosening her cloak, and producing a delicate silken sound that had a thrilling effect of intimate nearness, bewildered me as much as if she and my aunt had jointly held some guilty secret of my past and were flanking my resulting discomfiture.

I did feel encompassed by a situation. No doubt the

situation impinged more acutely because it was built up out of the material of dreams.

I heard her speak in an undertone to her companion, a contralto undertone that was like her color made audible, and that seemed to be left as a suspended note when the click of the baton hushed the murmurs of the audience.

I shall never be clear as to those first numbers of the concert. If presence colors a scene, how much more does it color sound? When that first gush of melody poured into the space I knew what romance, what even a whimsical romantic dream, could do with elemental sensation. This is put wrongly. I should say that I was placed in a position to know, for I analyzed nothing at all while I sat there in an absurd sensuous stupor, taking half-breaths in the tensivity of attention, with that corner-of-the-eye image looming against the tapestries of tone. Every instrument picked its way through the mesh of sound with an extraordinary clearness such as I never remember to have noticed before, as of fibers heightened by concentrated light. I got new elfin notes from the clarinets, odd voicelike mutterings from the horns. The cymbals brought together in a slanting softness had a quality like iridescent mosaic; and a phrase from the harp was as piercingly clear as dripping gold against velvet.

She sat very still, as if she found images just as vivid. Her gloves came together in a quick staccato when the applause time came, and I caught sight of something falling.

I knew that her program had slipped from her knees. It was at my feet. I picked it up.

It was my privilege to speak to her, and it was absurd that I should be frightened by the privilege, which, now that I had picked up the thing, had become a compulsion. So far as I knew she was waiting in that queenly way of hers to see how I should do it.



"Your program . . ." I said, huskily, with the leaves extended.

And she ignored me.

Then, at the end of perhaps a full two seconds, the mother stirred, reached over to take my offering, and said, "Thank you!" with an unmistakable inflection of apology.

In that instant, as completely as if it had been said in a tone of thunder, I understood. As suddenly it became incredible that I should not have known all along that Felicia is blind.

At once, with a burning obviousness, the face at the window, feeling for the light, had been a blind face. At once the face that lifted from the tonneau of the car, the face that turned at the sound of the step there by the railings of the Square, had been a blind face, and that sheltering touch of the mother had been the most eloquent gesture that ever went unread.

It was not as if every light in the hall had gone out. Rather it was as if a million lights had been suddenly turned on, flooding with a fearful radiance the pathos of a fact.

I was seized by an intense longing to look at her eyes, and it was strange to find that this became more definitely impossible than if she could see me do it.

And the orchestra began the "Unfinished Symphony." . . .

Listening beside her, I caught every throb of the music with an emotion of awe. I closed my eyes to feel the unobscured sound. . . . Unobscured. With eyes closed, it *was* unobscured. The mottled field of hats, the cut of the director's coat, the quaint baldness of the man holding the oboe, all became less than of no consequence. With the scene shut out the pure loveliness of the tone poem floated free like pageantry of the sky. It was no longer the image of a tapestry, but of a firmament. . . .

I came back to us there in a row—to Sarah with her

long, curved lashes close together; to my aunt looking like a comfortable cultured rounder; to Felicia with her fingers laced; to myself with legs asleep in the stress.

Inevitably I fell to thinking how that none of these signs meant anything to Felicia. . . .

Physical infirmities, for example, so long as they do not approach her, will mean no tax upon sympathy. She need be sorry only for adversities she hears.

She will never know how a blinded soldier looks.

Yes, Felicia, you will not see the ghastly black letters in the papers informing us that the United States of America is going to war.

I hope they will tell you of this in some soft way. Be glad that you are far from that symphony of the guns. Be glad that you can go on, as it seems you may, building a world as it ought to be.

## PART FIVE

### *The Bugle*

#### I

“AND yet,” said my aunt, “this war plunge somehow seems terribly sudden.”

“If you had been courted violently for the same length of time,” I suggested, “you would say the same thing when the man came to the point. War could hardly have come less suddenly.”

“I know. Yet it does seem sudden.”

There can be no question about the thrill of the decision.

That cloud was a long time rising and spreading. The thunder rumbled as of something at a great distance that might dissolve and blow itself out of the blue. Then the sky darkened and the bolt fell. And we looked at one another in a kind of sheepish excitement.

We have known the war as something in type. For us the men who have died have died in print, and in print we have now gone to war.

The word “war” still has an amazing unreality. We have had the type thrill, but we have heard no sound of real war, nor seen a splash of its blood. It is a name, a mirage, as remote as heaven—or hell.

If there is such a thing as American idealism we shall be able to test it splendidly, for the war is so far away that we cannot be jostled into it. We must go deliberately to find it. If we are to fight with anger we shall have to keep angry for a long time. If we are to have a holy zeal we shall be obliged, like the Crusaders,

to nurse our divine flame through long spaces that may not be leaped even by a conquering enthusiasm.

It is to be America's "show down." The precocious child among the nations, proud of his bulk, prodigal in dreams, stirred with shrewd ambitions, absorbed in prodigious games, is confronted by a man's job.

We are to find out what we are made of—literally. We are to find out what the melting-pot really has done. We are to find out how American patriotism defines itself, how it views its obligations to America and to the community of the world.

We are to find out how the men and women members of the club we call the United States feel about a danger call.

We are to find out what flags and national hymns have been meaning to the individual heart.

We are to have a new *Who's Who in America*.

In the glare of the test we shall realize the staggering difference between talking and doing. We shall realize the difference between printed unity and action unity, between literary patriotism and sacrifice that is ready for the grime.

We shall cheer and be sickened, and cheer again. We shall feel toward some of our own people an anger deeper than any that may be felt toward the enemy. We shall eat the bitter bread of disenchantment and grow a faith in real things.

We shall emerge begrimed and purified.

The nation's Great Desire may then shine clearer.

We shall perhaps find out whether a nation may be said to have a desire . . . whether a nation is, indeed, not a gigantic illusion, an artifice unified only in a state of inertia.

We surely shall find that a nation is but a bunch of human souls, most of them incapable of a coherent dream. . . . Life has made them distrustful of dreams . . . and with but one clearly recognizable mass-wish, the wish to get that which the mass holds back.

## II

Suddenly the city is full of flags. At least that would be a way of saying it. In every street there is the sign. Big flags, pompous, swaggering flags, and little, shabby flags, some of them to be suspected of not standing by their colors in the wet. But there is not a flag for every family, nor even for every house. It is not to be expected. There are not enough. Men go from shop to shop begging for flags. Flag-makers are bewildered. Women sew through the nights putting together stars and stripes. Yet there is not enough. Probably all the flags of all the peoples in the world would not be enough.

There is a flag out of our window—the middle one. My aunt had it neatly folded from its last outing on Washington's Birthday, when it was strung flat against the house. Yesterday she commissioned me to get a bracket and pole, so that now it floats free.

There is a flag from Felicia's window, an intensely new one, with stripes very brightly crimson, as if to insist even to her blind eyes that the stripes must be seen.

Pietro has the Italian and American flag X-d over his shine-booth.

Old Drynd has found a way of hanging a British Union Jack in company with our emblem on a string stretched beyond the dusty window of his shop.

Hortense, the French laundress near the other corner (she has a solemn husband who wears a skull-cap), has brought about a prim partnership with the Tricolor. It is as if the two flags had been ironed against the window.

And the German saloon half a block beyond Madame Hortense has a large American flag quite by itself. The hem of the flag trails over a statuette of a fat gnome straddling a barrel and holding aloft a dripping tankard.

There will be thousands upon thousands of buildings

that will never have a flag. As there will be some of us who will think we can have a war by hanging out a flag, there will be others of us who will think we can refuse war by omitting the emblem. Largely, of course, the absent flag will mean plain indifference. And it may be that an absolutely logical reiteration would be absurd . . . as if everybody were to go about singing "The Star-spangled Banner."

We shall have to go farther than the emblems. Tonight the scarlet note of a bugle stirred echoes in the street. A line of youngsters drilled for an hour, swinging and stamping, and backing out of the way of passing automobiles. A grizzled White-wings man with his street broom, wearing the only uniform in sight, stood long in study of the clumsy maneuvers. There were other groups in other streets, sometimes with fife and drum. There is a marching throb with a suggestion of "rag" in it. Proclamations hang in the shops. The President proclaims and the Mayor proclaims. We are to be good citizens of the Republic. Those of us who are not citizens are to be circumspect, on penalty.

There will be a great army. The great army will go across the sea.

This great army the manhood of the country is urged to join—the young manhood of the country. As if the nation had hung out the sign, "Boys Wanted."

Hitherto the nation has asked only that we obey the rules of the club and once a year drop in a box a piece of paper expressing an opinion as to how the club should be run.

Now, at a stroke, a vastly urgent need for another kind of membership has become blazingly plain. The club asks us to become active members—to *do* something. And for this something which we are to do an opinion and a piece of paper are not enough.

We are asked to give not our opinion-manhood, but

our body-manhood. The monster who is running amuck cannot be stopped by pieces of paper. There is no alternative.

Our opinion-manhood might be a pretty cheap affair and get no rebuke save in a sense of the results. Our body-manhood, however, is to be looked at a second time. This must be real. There are ways of testing it. It is subject to weighing and measuring.

A man arguing in a group before a recruiting station last night spat it out harshly and honestly. "Every one of you that is the size of a man . . ."

### III

#### *The size of a man!*

There have been literacy tests, all sorts of tests by which those of us who are defective in the head may be set apart in an orderly way. Tests of the body have been standardized with still more exacting precision.

One must, in fact, first be the size of a man. The inches of height have a fixed minimum. When I asked the sergeant at the recruiting station he confirmed this fact with an awkward, uncomfortable glance that did credit to his sympathies.

"Why are they afraid of little men?" I asked the sergeant.

"Well, you see . . . there is the line, and the equipment, and . . ."

"And the rifles?"

"Yes."

"And everything has to be interchangeable?"

"Yes."

"Of course. You couldn't have different sizes of rifle."

"There is this, too," urged the sergeant. "Of course they have to step together and all that. And there is another thing . . ." He eyed me as if to decide whether he might mention this. I held him to it. "There is

this, you know. If there is anything about a man like—”

“Like being a hunchback.”

He winced as if I had prodded him with something sharp.

“I mean, like his being very short, *very* short, you understand; it makes him stand out. Makes it disagreeable for him, men bein’ the way they are.”

“I see,” said I. “They would have too much fun with him.”

“I guess they would,” said the sergeant.

“And yet,” I said, “short men have done well in war. There was Alexander the Great, and Cæsar, and Napoleon, and Nelson, and Grant, and Lord Roberts, and Funston, and a lot more. . . .”

The sergeant probably did not gather much of this, for he was looking over my head with an uneasy glitter in his eye.

When I heard a muttered “Wants to enlist!” I turned far enough to see a watching group of boys and men.

“That’s what you mean,” I said to the sergeant, indicating the group.

He nodded.

“Even if they were always sorry for him it would be a nuisance, wouldn’t it?”

“And it’s a damned tough game, you must remember,” declared the sergeant. “A hell of a hard game. Bein’ six foot doesn’t put you in it. That’s what lots of them are finding out. They’re rejecting them right and left. Flat feet, and bum eyes, and weak hearts, and all that. Men that couldn’t stand it. Only be in the way. They chucked out a fellow last night that looked good for a traffic cop.”

He emphasized the unavailable six-footers with a easily discernable intention.

Yet I knew he was quite truthful. We begin our war drama by discovering the rarity of the physically fit.



Being a soldier is more complicated than being a traffic cop . . . or even an alderman.

War ends with cripples. It can't afford to begin with them.

I remember a morbid time when I traced the history of famous marked men. It began with the discovery that dear old Epictetus was a hunchback. I found a somber joy in the triumphs, or at least in the force, of these afflicted heroes. Pope's hump may have injected an acidulous vein into his philosophy, but he did take British literature by the throat. If Byron's club foot bred in him envious sarcasms about dancing, it did not deter him from hurling himself into the fight for Greek independence. The darkness that lost Milton the chance to be a soldier was soon alive with the most impressive swarm of souls ever pictured by the human imagination. Yes, the twisted, the halt, and the blind have smashed their way through to the forefront of the world.

I am glad to think that I haven't made a habit of such speculation. I read *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. I grieved over Lanciotte, and shuddered at the fate of that poor buffoon of the Sultan of Kashgar. This was inevitable in a boy who ravened over books. Mostly, as I intimated to Zorn, I have not thought of such things.

Nevertheless, it becomes a lie to say that war is now a matter of brains and machinery. I suspect that it is as much a matter of men as ever it was.

I am strong, I can shoot. I could drive a tank. But the die-cut system is in the way. There is no chance to challenge the Goliath. The tape-measure men will go to the front.

Why should there not be a dwarf army?—an army of discards—self-sustaining discards, not weaklings?—an army of originals, fitted out with shorter guns, if need be?

A bantam brigade.

The comic artists would chortle, but history has told tales that might make the scheme something more than amusing.

Good God! War reeks with ironies—ironies that belong to peoples and systems. War itself is the supreme irony, the ultimate Bleeding Joke. To elect peace the vote of nations must be unanimous. One Prussian black ball sends the world into convulsions—as one beast in a crowd can upset the nicest ideals of deportment. But with nations, thrashing the beast has a formula. Men must go and come by formula. They must be fitted together by formula. So that size and shape are not arbitrary elements of requirement. There is necessity. The real machine is the mass of men.

It is all wonderfully logical.

#### IV

A sense of something that is happening to the city, in common with so many thousands of other cities, took me to our roof last night, and thereby to an adventure.

Our roof has but a hillock height in the architectural mountain chain, but it is not one of the dwarf roofs. It belongs to the physically fit.

One can forgive a city from its roofs. Particularly at night. There is something pathetic as well as splendid in the heave of its lines, a silencing sadness in the effect of concealed struggle . . . of life unconscious of the turned key. The dumb look of roofs spreads a kind of visible stillness over the incrustation and removes to an immense distance the abated murmurs of the streets . . . streets stretching to the night's horizon and marked out theatrically in slantings of light.

I never before had realized the amazing fantasy that might lurk in light, in grotesque spatterings of it, in pale shafts of it flicking over the huddled shoulders of steel and stone, in a mysterious veiled glitter as of half-closed

eyes in a darkened face. The great towers, some of them flashing in a reflected fire, stood sharply above the flowing blackness, and bubbles of light trailed northward like a phosphorescent wake.

Millions of windows. . . . One might stand the night through, arm in arm with a chimney-pot, wondering why one window in a tower remains lighted while all the others are dark, and be particularly curious when the one window is very high, say in the twenty-second story . . . staring steadily into the night. It might be of some little all-night print-shop in which a man wearing spectacles and a green eye-shade is juggling with lead over an oily composing-table. It might mark the crib of a jaded shipping-clerk packing mechanical dolls or pearl buttons or insomnia pellets for a midnight-express car. It might carry the glow of a lamp under which a triangular group of German spies is laboring over a code message. It might look out from a janitor's apartment where there is a baby whimpering in a fever. It might label the whereabouts of a bald-headed man droning to a sleepy, taffy-haired stenographer, acutely conscious that the steam has been shut off, and temperamentally skeptical as to rewards. There might be a boy up there, beside a telephone, deep in a cow-boy thriller, waiting, with one foot on a grip or a bundle, for some hurried command over the wire. There might be an Englishman who is going home to enlist, sailing on a ship that gets away to-morrow, and nervously tying up the last of the severed arteries of his business life. Or there might be a cashier with twitching lips and furrows in his forehead, secretly back at his post, striding the floor, sitting before open books in long, hard silence, then walking at last to the window, where he could see the shimmering panorama from river to river, and wonder whether it is true that you lose consciousness before finishing such a fall to the street. . . .

Over there, across the way, obscured now by the high

front of the parapet, would be the windows of Felicia's rooms, shining with a special softness and warmth. Behind hundreds of thousands of windows, all the way from the Battery to the region of the long-defunct Monsieur Bronc's farm, there would be Felicias, not one of them, perhaps, at this moment thinking of the stars. Certainly a good many of them would be in hall bedrooms staring at ugly wall-paper . . . with half-finished repairs on the heels of silk stockings. . . . An immense number of them must be lonesome. Lonesome! A huge joke this lonesomeness of men and women, all wanting, stupidly or eagerly, something the opposite of lonesomeness . . . starving in the midst of plenty, or nursing lonesomely the results of unsuccessful rebellion. The city is a great blunderer; lavishly assembling the elements of life, heaping up fuel for the sacred fire and neglecting the spark; filing the documents for endless prodigies of romance, and losing the index; building a highway of Life that turns out to be a labyrinth . . . or a crystal maze in which you are eternally meeting yourself. . . .

And now from over the cliff came a burst of ragtime music with a banjo in it. I fancied that some windows near at hand had been opened perhaps to let out the smoke. Laughter and a deep voice with a chuckling vibration sounded suddenly near, then were muffled.

The roof adjoining on the east is lower by seven or eight feet. On the west the neighbor roof is still farther below. I noticed this with a feeling of being lifted and of being more alone. I looked up at the sky, which, like an appalling indigo mirror, seemed to be reflecting in fitful iterations the piecing sparkles of the city beneath . . . until its glory had time to shrivel such an image, to make a spectator, even an elated and uplifted spectator, diminish like a light-flooded iris. . . .

And then I had the feeling of not being alone. The idea was incredible enough to make speculation rather

exciting. When I turned about, crunching the gravel under my feet, I wondered whether I really had heard a fainter iteration of that sound, or merely felt the mental echo.

I walked to the middle of the roof, stepped upon a wooden runway, noting the chimneys one by one, the vent-pipes and other silhouettes of the foreground.

Evidently, I thought, it is an illusion natural to such an imaginative excursion. For the moment even the rumble of elevated trains and the bleating of auto-horns seemed to fade out of the remote orchestration. I suppose my intensity had something to do with the effect of a sudden, astonishing silence.

When I saw the man he was directly in front of me, standing on the runway. I had reason to find something phantasmal in the look of him, even if a lycanthropy of my own had not invested him with the form of a beast.

It came in one of those queer flashes so hard to explain—they are too quick for reason—that he had climbed from the easterly roof. I am sure that I didn't figure out that he couldn't have come up by the roof stairway as I did, without my knowing it, though I afterward realized that this was a fact. I should certainly have seen him reach the roof by the stairway, for the partly open metal door showed a faint light from the landing below, and his figure against this opening would have marked itself clearly.

"Where did you come from?"

It was inevitable that I should ask this question. I had thought it, and there was a blank that had to be filled.

He neither moved nor answered for a moment, and in that interval I made out that he was youngish, with a smooth, sharp-featured face; that he wore a light-colored overcoat.

Then he answered: "None of your damned business. Get out of m' way!"

"Your way. . . ?"

I was, it seemed, blocking his path to the door, which had not occurred to me. To open that path at once assumed the character of participation in whatever game he was playing. His way of putting the thing certainly hadn't colored the enterprise very happily.

"You little monkey . . . I tell you to get out of m' way, or, by Jesus . . ."

At this I caught the shine of the revolver, not leveled as I once fancied such a matter, but much more simply, with only a slightly raised hand, and promising a bullet somewhere in the region of my breastbone.

No one, I am sure, could have for unwelcome physical contact a greater abhorrence than I, yet no hunchback, I am equally sure, has ever been able to avoid speculation upon the question of his possible adjustment to conflict. Moreover, my thought had been full of the war, and of the great finger it had thrust at me.

I had a theory about myself. It grew up in the feel of my long arms and in a confidence I have always had about my hands. . . .

I had known just how I should do that which I did do in the instant after the insult and the oath. It is foolish to contend that in an emergency one never acts as he expected he would. There is such a thing as a formula that leaps to the case. I proved it. I knew (that Jap professor had labored long to make it clear) precisely how I should catch his wrist. The crack of the bones sounded precisely as I knew it would . . . a miserable sound, but signaling the success of the function performed.

The revolver fell between my feet, clattering into the gravel.

And we stood there, after his guttural shriek, in a slightly changed position, the faint light from the door striping the length of him. His look was a disagreeable thing to see . . . with the hand dangling.

Then he was at the door, leaping, as it seemed, the whole flight of steps—in a flash, without a word.

I caught up the revolver and automatically swung about to reach the door, opening my mouth to shout, piercingly incited by an impulse to leap after him.

Instead I sat down on the top step with a nausea.

One may have a formula, yet not be accustomed to some things.

## V

In a moment I had fastened the door and was stumbling down the steps. There was no formula for this situation. Yelling down the elevator shaft would have doubtful, perhaps dangerous, results. The man would get out. Our own accounts were squared. Injury to that brown optimist, Randolph—if it was Randolph and not Alonzo—would be an unpleasant thing to have on the conscience. The man was, undoubtedly, a crook. That entailed certain obligations. But I knew nothing of his offenses.

I kept on, flight after flight, turning the situation in my mind. Randolph introduced a trite variation on a traditional calamity. He was asleep at the switchboard. I was glad of it, though I awakened him and asked the way to the police station. He told me, with signs of a feeling that in an organism less lymphatic and less sleepy might have amounted to curiosity, and that would, I was sure, develop after I left him into a personal anxiety.

On the way to the police station I experienced that emotional daze which recalled the night I walked four miles in the dark to fetch a priest to a dying woman. Somehow that had been very awkward. I never had met the priest, and wondered all the way whether he might be expected to come willingly. There was another night, wet and cold, when I drove in mad haste for a doctor, and a bridge was down. . . . The

doctor, the clergyman, and the policeman . . . the Trouble Trinity.

I climbed the steps under the green light.

At first I could see no one in the station, for the lieutenant was bent heavily over his blotter and chose not to look up.

Taking the revolver out of my pocket, I laid it on the rail of the high desk.

This brought up the lieutenant's head.

"There's a story goes with that," I said.

He stood up now, a ruddy man with a dyed mustache and little, sharp, dark eyes, who stared at me with pulled-together brows.

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

"I took that away from a man who pointed it at me." Which sounded, when I had said it, exactly like a school-boy's complaint at teacher's desk.

"The hell you did!" remarked the lieutenant.

He still stood with his hands in his pockets.

"Where was this?" He now reached for the weapon and quietly looked to see how many shells it held.

Well, I got out the story at last and succeeded in arousing an interest that manifested itself first in the lieutenant's decision to sit down, and second in a summons that brought in a man who gave me a strong impression of nose and scarf-pin—an intensely casual man who vacantly looked me over while the lieutenant spoke, then dropped the last of a cigar into a titanic cuspidor.

Bill was to go and see what all this meant—go through the apartment-building next door, and through our own house, also to see, and so forth. There hadn't been any report. But the thing had just happened. Maybe this was Butch Thowler. Or maybe Langier. It sounded like Langier. Did Bill understand that Langier was out?

Bill didn't know, and apparently had no opinion.



He went back for his overcoat and moved casually toward the door. He seemed to leave the labor of opening the door to me.

As I placed my hand on the knob the lieutenant spoke up again.

"By the way, son, what d'you happen to be doing on the roof?"

"Doing?" I turned indignantly. "Doing? You don't suppose I was there by appointment, do you?"

At which the lieutenant became extremely solemn and fatherly.

"Don't get scrappy. I'm asking you a question. You must have been up there for something. It isn't a summer night. You hadn't carried your bed up there."

"I went up to look at the city," I said. "Is that lawful?"

"I see," said the lieutenant. "Go on, Bill."

Bill went on as I opened the door, leaving me to follow. Bill, it soon appeared, was a ward detective. That is, it appeared when I asked him what he was.

"What are you?" asked Bill.

I had never in my life listened to two questions so hard to answer as the two here fallen together less than five minutes apart. What was I doing on the roof? What *was* I doing on the roof that could be made to sound sane or plausible to a man with a dyed mustache and shoe-button eyes? And now, "What are *you*?" How could any explanation of myself be made to sound excusable to a satiated ward detective with a purple nose and a scarf-pin of such extraordinary splendor?

All the same, when I had told Bill (his name is Morrissey) something about my humble functions as a writing person he showed real interest. He had a brother-in-law who used to be a reporter. Now he was a court clerk. A crackerjack writer. Especially on racing stuff and sports. They sent him all the way to

Reno to do the Jeffreys-Johnson fight. Why, he knew Jim Corbett just like you would know your own brother, and fellows like Biff Hannigan . . . well, they read their contracts to him and told him all their troubles.

As promising to aid conversation I said I had known Biff when he was a boy.

A clever kid, that Hannigan, was Bill's opinion. Nobody's damn fool. Bet your pants on that. They said his grandfather had left him a lot of money. Biff was a good free spender. He'd blow it all quick enough.

As for Bill himself, he would like to have a hell of a nice farm, somewhere in Pennsylvania, say, and raise horses.

"And chuck New York?" I asked him.

"Oh, I'd like to get in here for a couple of months in the winter and see the shows and run around a little. But New York ain't what it used to be. Not by a damned sight. Too much interference. When they get tired of interfering with everything else they pound the police. It's got to be a great burg for soreheads. Makes you sick to see these reformers running around. . . . Bugs. . . . A lot of Bugs."

## VI

Though it came to nothing of great importance—except the importance of something that didn't happen, or that hasn't happened yet—I was glad to follow at Bill Morrissey's elbow while he looked into the matter of my man of the roof.

The most interesting part of it, of course, was Bill himself. He continued to be so startlingly casual, without being exactly perfunctory. I suppose it was quite professional, this way of doing it, though it hardly measured to any conduct I had fancied in a police person.

Twice in the midst of our investigation—I became a part of the affair because I had seen the man's face

and this might have a bearing—he returned to his dream of a farm. He asked me whether I knew about farms. Were there any good farms in Connecticut, for example—not regular high-priced big farms, but say a smallish farm, with a nice little house and a barn? A barn you could keep a flivver in, too, and say a couple of cows. He wanted to know also whether in my part of Connecticut people were Democrats or Republicans—or did they have Socialists there?

It did not seem to bother him that our discussion of farms had to be fragmentary. In fact, it was just after knocking on one of the doors in the house we were touring from floor to floor that he turned to me earnestly—

“They raise tobacco? The hell yer say! I thought it was all in Kentucky and Virginia. I get yer! I remember them ‘Connecticut wrappers.’ But I guess I’d buy my smokes. Something plainer for me—like corn and barley and strawberries and melons . . .”

The woman who opened the door stared (Bill didn’t hurry his remark because the door had opened), and Bill became a detective again, without haste, and genially. To me it seemed distressing to intrude upon privacy; to startle it with unexpected inquiries which amounted to, “Have you been robbed?” But Bill was not at all annoyed by his obligations. He was the kind of man that keeps free of effects. He watched effects as you might watch the rings after dropping a pebble into a pond.

I began to hope that he would get his farm. His desire to have in it nothing unreasonable. But I couldn’t make him fit the picture. I wondered if he would keep on with the scarf-pin, and what Mrs. Morrissey wanted.

In the end, after finding the unfastened skylight, we found the unlocked apartment door. The odd part of this was that the unlocked door had precipitated a pro-

digious quarrel between two very nice old women who had each accused the other of a negligence. Both wore quilted kimono things, which led me to think that they had been preparing for bed, and this made Morrissey's inquiry seem a cruelty. They had already assured themselves that nothing had been stolen, but they began all over again to be sure. From the hallway I gathered that this process proceeded on a system—that the vital spots were fixed and familiar; otherwise it was impossible to understand how they could be sure in so short a space of time. Of course there was the need to get rid of Morrissey. That may have hastened them. Anyway, they were sure. And they gasped their gratitude.

The top floor, where two bachelors were having a party, gave Morrissey his last chapter and his story.

"This crook came in the afternoon," he said, "got frightened out of the old ladies' home, slipped to the top floor, and was cornered there by that fat boob who came home at four; and he hid in that roof-ladder closet. But Mr. Fatty had the door open 'n account of that ice-box (with the booze and things in it). Crook couldn't see a clear way. Then probably he got things loose at the skylight. That was a bum chance. He'd rather walk out. He waited for that. Then they put that trunk out in the hall and Mr. Crook couldn't open the door. Likely he was on the roof quite a while, expecting to get back again, maybe, when the party was over. Then he tried his luck on your roof. Some Swede might have left the iron door unlocked. Say—"

Morrissey looked down at me after lighting a fresh cigar.

"How did you get the gun from him?"

"By breaking his wrist," I said. "Or it sounded that way."

"Well, what d'yer know about that!"

Morrissey swathed me with smoke and watched me emerge with something very like real interest.

"Pretty good, eh? Damn good stuff. Regular jooney-jit. I'll have to tell your friend Biff Hannigan I know some one who can take him on. I'm not kiddin' you. That *was* good stuff."

I felt that he would, if he could have thought of a decent way of doing it, have made it still clearer that he meant to praise the feat not merely as something done by me, but objectively, as a thing neat in itself.

"As for that," I said, "so long as you don't ask me to prove that I could do it again all will be well. That is, all will be well except for Mr. Crook."

"Yes," observed Morrissey, "we got him tagged for a while."

But I hoped that Morrissey might not profit by the tag. I didn't like any side of the prospect of a captured thief. If the thief who had stolen nothing was willing to call it square I was ardently disposed to have the matter stand that way.

"Anyhow," I said to Morrissey when we were parting, "you would almost be willing to call me physically fit."

"Physically . . ." Morrissey gathered me to a focus. "Sure thing! Why not?"

## VII

I have just been reading again Rudley's letter that came to me last January—written aboard ship, most of it, with a postscript added in London—a letter bristling with unsaid things, as per this highly censored interval.

The letter to Sarah which came two weeks later—there was a kind of bitterness in its getting to me—had more color. This letter had, in fact, a defiant high spirits, or what seemed to be that. Rudley's amazing confidence shone in every line that spoke of his intentions and expectations. Unless I have read him wrongly he is not at all confident about Sarah—one way or

the other. It would have been interesting to read him on the subject of Sarah at a time when he was not being borne along on the tide of an extraordinary emotion of zeal for the fight ahead of him.

Now here comes another letter from France, written before America's war days. The fact that I see this also is the best evidence—quite aside from its allusions—that Sarah has written no word. This new letter shows him caught up by a novitiate's ardor for the great game, writing "Lafayette" with a tingle of exultation; and in a kind of track-meet eagerness for the get-away he stands out sharply as so much poised energy chuckling in the face of death.

I wished he had told how he worked out the matter of the enlistment. Evidently the path behind him is soon forgotten.

. . . These boys [he says] are wonderful. Just kids, most of them. Here and in the Flying Corps—you would laugh to know how young some of them are—eighteen, nineteen, twenty. It is astonishing. I feel like a grown-up. All sorts of remarkable boys. And some men that make me feel like an infant. Oh yes!—I feel young enough most of the time. It's tremendous, this flying fight thing. Of co' rse I'm "cashing in" on my engineering and my motor experience—just enough to keep me from moping over the delays. Nothing else is like flying, nothing else counts much in making you—either you can fly or you can't. If you can't, they prefer to find out before your failure has been too expensive. And yet a lad who killed himself yesterday—and no one but himself to blame—was one of the most wonderful in the bunch. It was just luck.

I've seen some of the great French aces—glimpses. And there is a daredevil Englishman. As for looking the part, I like—but of course I mustn't give his name. You'll hear from him. He was standing beside his Spad yesterday when one of my chums grunted, "D'Artagnan." I can't begin to tell you about the spirit among these men. You don't get it—at least not this way—when you're just going through the

regular game of living. Perhaps they're not all different. Maybe it is what has happened to them, and what is going to happen to them. Can you imagine life and death coming to mean the same thing? Of course you can't. Not that much is said. Zorn would have to guess out what they were thinking. But it's clear enough that something—call it any fancy name you like—holds them all—even while they are acting very much like other fellows. You see, there's a history behind the game—something has been built up. You feel it before you find out what it is, or before you could begin to figure out what it might be. And it does something to you—changes everything. Not any thinking you might do about those at home—of course not—unless it might be (may I say this?) to make certain splendidly *understanding* persons seem more worth while than ever.

Some day you *will* write to me. I know this positively. We aviators acquire superstitions. They keep one warm. And I have a thrilling hunch in the matter of a letter from you. But don't delay, because the absence of a letter is, I'm afraid, depriving a fractional but important element in the air service of a great stimulus. If you *have* written, please remember the torpedo hazards and do it again.

In fact, now that the U. S. is in it I don't see how you can escape. Soldiers must have what they ask for. I'm not wailing for socks. What I want can be done with a pen.

I wrote to him to-day. Sarah knows that I have done so. I wanted her to know. Without a word between us, she knows that I felt the situation to be intolerable. He is a soldier. That is a commanding fact. Any hurt of ours becomes a small matter. Of course Zorn must be writing to him regularly. As for Sarah, she may do it yet. I don't know just how she would do it—just how she could do it. There might be a way. She will think all the things that only a woman, perhaps, can think about a man at the front. Making those bandages and compresses in a Red Cross class is a big thinking job. . . It must be tremendously softening. It must bring up some very cruel pictures. . . . Mean-

while, I'm sure she is glad that I have done it. I saw this in her eyes.

And yet she has amazed me by receiving Pine with what I first took for a horrible insincerity, but which I begin to regard as a real interest—as if she were at least touched by something like fascination.

Pine has taken on a big air about the war. It is very ingenious. It is even rather impressive; for he never by any chance belittles any expressions of patriotism. Nothing he says gives one a handle with which to fling a retort at his infernally handsome head.

But this can't go on. Sooner or later he is bound to blunder. Then I hope Sarah will neatly rip him up.

He may ignore this call for volunteers. He may ignore every other call. Yet something will wring the truth out of him. And then this Olympian business will be at an end. Sooner or later it will be proved that every creature must be on one side or the other.

The position, if it is a position, of those who can pull away has begun to have for me an appalling mystery. The Socialist theory I can understand. . . . That we are not only a brotherhood, but naturally an organized brotherhood, and that an organized refusal of war must end it—that even isolated refusals to accept refusal must, in the end, shrivel under the pressure. But individual withdrawal, even from organization—this utter Anarchism with or without the name—is hard to understand.

I have wished that I could look Anarchism in the eyes. Not merely read scraps of its sentiment. Not merely hear soap-box subtleties dribbled cautiously in sight of a policeman with his stenographer. No—the real thing, whatever it is. Not selfish individual rebellion, refusing a label, but devoted rebellion with a banner, and a joy of risking jail.

Pine won't do. Even if he could be tricked into talk



I'm sure he has nothing but a personal feeling for what he sees as the aura of Anarchism. The articulation of its body doesn't appeal to him.

I met Pine in the hall last night just after he had said good night to Sarah.

"Pine," I said, "will you take me to Anna Jassard?"

He had a dumfounded look for a moment. I knew that he was fumbling with the bearings of the matter, with how it might affect him one way or the other; perhaps with curiosity, too, or perplexity as to what Anna Jassard might think or do and what I might be expected to think or do.

His first venture was an evasion.

"You mean, take you to hear her?"

"No," I said, "not merely to hear her as an audience in the ruck hears her. I want to talk with her alone. You will introduce me—be sponsor for me as just a plain fool, not to be suspected of being an official or affiliated fool."

"I see," said Pine, with an odd smile. "Well—why shouldn't I? . . . I mean that of course I will. I'm not a crony, you know. . . . I haven't seen her for quite a while. But I know her. I have high respect for her. It will be very illuminating to you . . . very. Not as you have thought. Perhaps not at all as you have thought. That doesn't matter. She will be glad to see you. You will be fair. That doesn't matter, either. She will attend to that. When shall we go?"

Nevertheless, now that we are to go, I have a somewhat appalled, if not precisely an awed uneasiness. It isn't exactly as if I were going to call on the devil. The devil is standardized. We can objectify our conclusions with regard to him. He is a fallen angel. There is no pretense that he didn't fall or that his fall is not final. Emerson, I think it was, called him "the dear old devil." . . . But the arch-Anarchist . . . that is different.

One can't fancy the devil as being irritating, for instance; or disappointing. And that is a great matter.

## VIII

There is to be a draft.

It was bad psychology to call it that. A "conscript" army has a disagreeable sound. Conscription should have received a heroic name. While we are living on labels this would have made a difference. In the end I suppose the slacker instinct is superior to descriptive ornament. Yet a kindling name might have helped the kindling fact. There are a thousand evidences of a wish to get great words fastened safely and effectively upon great things. After studying the geography of Europe down to its very lanes and hillocks, we are to study the geography of our own national mind, to classify ourselves, to classify the tools of battle, to label men and women, not only as to what they are worth in war, but as to what they are worth in a nation at war.

We shall do this, I am sure, with as much of bewilderment as if we had not seen the whole drama of participation acted out in Europe. With the conflagration in full blaze, and burning in our direction; with hose and buckets moving under frantic effort; with energy and courage straining in devout determination to smother the flames and restrain the incendiary—there will be the pacifist smugly asking us all to sit down and reason together on the question of fire-proofing. . . .

I have registered as of New York—after finding a task in the registration work. For a time I debated as to the sentiment of registration from my home place. But the irony might just as well have a setting here with the vast group.

There will be something large, something theatrically awesome, in this box seat at the national lottery.

I will have a number. They can't take that away from me.

If I am drawn, the United States will have to come to the point. It shall be yea or nay for a reason. And I shall find my work on my own account.

Aunt Paul couldn't wholly conceal her thoughts when she looked at me after hearing of the draft plan. There was no need to express them.

Sarah is so stirred by all that stands in the immediate foreground that I am sure she regards the great lottery as a negligible detail.

"We women may not be numbered," she said, "but we are called just the same."

Sarah has begun to act as if she had been called. She has been helping on the registration (it was in a restaurant), and is now Red-Crossing for most of the daylight hours. She may not end in a Battalion of Death, but she will get some things done.

She has been diagramming for me the bandages and compresses. There is one bandage with five tails to it. . . . This puttering will not keep her very long. She argues, why not do this by machinery? Surely not merely days, but minutes must count. And there must be bigger things women can do and do at once.

"A needed bandage is a pretty big thing, my dear," remarked my aunt.

"I know," expostulated Sarah. "But you should see the fluffy way they are doing it. It is as if a group of children were at work—without tools. This is the United States of America."

"Yes," snapped my aunt, "it is because this is the United States of America that we haven't war tools. Let's keep our hands and heads busy until the tools come along."

Naturally Sarah wants to finish the war by three-forty-five to-morrow afternoon.

## IX

I have seen my ogre, the Anarchist woman.

The result might have been different if I had chanced upon the meeting rather than challenged it. I don't know. There was nothing to indicate that she was not as she always is. Yet even she, this storm-petrel of our civilization, must have felt some constraint. Above all there is the pressure of the war. She, along with the rest of the world, must be conscious of the changed center of gravity.

I didn't get to her without tempering. It saved time and a few blunders to have Pine expound her on the way.

"If you expect anything shrill," said Pine, "you will be disappointed. If you expect yawping about explosives you will be disappointed again. She never has preached violence. No one ever has accused her of violence or of participation in violence."

"I assume," I said, "that you're not speaking of her tongue."

"I'm speaking of traditions," said Pine. "They are important. We wrap traditions about people and believe in our own scarecrows. I thought that maybe you would like to know that she never has been called a violent person, even by ingenious detractors. In fact, she has always seemed to me as rather too sentimental."

"Your 'sentimental' is rather funny," I said. "The man who injected the explosive that precipitated this war was, I am sure, a very sentimental person. A sentimentalist shot Lincoln behind the ear."

"Also he had two legs," declared Pine, calmly. "There are kinds as well as degrees in this quality I'm thinking of. The point is that Anna Jassard is not violent or cruel—that she is a dreamer, an Idealist. Of course all Idealists are dangerous. It was so decided in Palestine a great many years ago. They gave the Idealist the

center of the stage when they set up the three crosses. This Idealist happens to be not much of a fanatic. She is a philosopher. If you have heard of her lecturing hundreds of times every year I don't know what you may have thought she lectured about. It may be that you would have been disconcerted to find her talking about great literature; about the drama, in which she has a passionate interest and a profound knowledge; about those very aspirations of the illuminated individual soul that are nearest to the highest consciousness of humanity.

"Possibly you have associated her somewhat with the police. My impression is that she was arrested and convicted but once. This was during times of bread riots, long ago, when she said something that was said many times in the same interval by college professors and at least one eminent dignitary of the Church. But you see, she was an Anarchist. And when an Anarchist says two and two make four the multiplication table at once goes under a cloud."

"And why not?" I demanded. "Motive is the big factor. It is intent that spreads the cloud. Your bomb-thrower uses gravitation. The force is perfectly respectable. But that doesn't whiten him."

We wrangled all the way to that door. . . . Probably it was not the best sort of introduction to my ordeal in the homely room. Yet it gave me something.

Pine left us there together . . . left us with a smile that contrived not to be irritating. After all, there was no burden upon him. And the Anarchist woman adjusted a chair for me at a table littered with books and pamphlets. There was a vase of flowers somewhere, on the edge of this table or near by . . . marigolds, I think. But I cannot be sure of anything in that place except the face of this strange woman . . . eying me with an often startling softness of attention or a kind of kindled patience; of her hair wound in a plain knot;

of high cheek-bones and fighting lips that were capable of an alleviating smile. I noticed her simple, dark dress and something white at the neck and wrists.

Of her voice one might say that probably it is anything she chooses to make it. It has the sound of having been intensely *used*—like the muscles of her face. She spoke swiftly. I can understand why the stenographers have writhed. There is no torrent as from one who hasn't had a chance to get things said. I'm sure that this was not an effect due to the fact that I am very small game. She has said it all too many times, in too many ways, to too many sorts to be eager. Certainly I didn't get the impression that she believed in conversational violence—at least not for the sport of it, or in conflict with a solemn small person who is not a capitalist. Moreover, her telephone rang a good deal. These punctuations do not help the curve of continuity. And they do lower the temperature of an argument.

I say "argument," though she ingeniously prevented the talk from reaching the real size of that.

Perhaps she did not play with me, but—well, she was abominably patient at times. And not altogether without a flame, either.

There was an hour of it.

Some moments of that hour will, I am sure, produce infuriating recollections . . . without having been infuriating in themselves. Other moments are certain to shine with an extraordinary brilliance.

The hour can't be written. It was too devious to make a document; there was too much swirl and too little current; though it had Book material. . . . I can see a chapter on "The Delusion of Liberty." I can see complete personal liberty as a great desire; perhaps as the supreme delusion . . . as fantastic as a drop of water hoping to survive separation from the sea, or a grain of sand from the shore going into business for itself.

## X

I told her so. And she looked at me, her chin in her hand, without for an instant showing her electrically quick reaction.

"Do you know," she said, "you have everything so comfortably card-catalogued. Your cosmogony is all scrubbed, washed behind its ears, its nose wiped, and set up where it won't get its clothes dirty. You ought to feel very comfortable."

Which means that we reached pleasantly caustic terms.

"As to feeling comfortable," I said, "perhaps I have a right to that aspiration. I do want to be comfortable. I hope you won't believe that I came to you looking for trouble. I wanted you to make clear to me something that has been incredible—a philosophy that refuses law—not an impulse, but a philosophy. I'm trying to understand how it can be believed that a universe of law—law in which there seems never to have been the slightest variation—can have a feature anywhere that is not to be subject to law; that is, to *order*. Nature seems to me to be insisting on order. This seems to me like saying that she insists on being comfortable. Make Nature uncomfortable and you hear from her. She keeps her books balanced. What I continue to see in your philosophy is a wish to get comfort *without* order. It seems to me that the universe is whispering, shouting all the time, that this can't be done."

She laughed softly. "Is it shouting at man to lock himself in a cage, link up creatures in a chain-gang, to *invent* horrors of restraint, of open, brutal slavery and call it *his* law? Nature's laws are all right. Whether they are or not, they are here. We must recognize them. But don't you think we have trouble enough adjusting ourselves to them—we in our ignorance of

what they mean at their best—without devising systems of which there is no whisper in nature—ghastly systems that thwart and mangle and crush, that stain the beauty of nature, that deny the impulses belonging to the very essence of nature?”

“What I mean,” I said, “is this: That of course it is not a case of nature *and* man. Man being part of nature—unnatural as he is—he can’t run his game without using nature’s machinery. And nature’s machine insists upon order, not approximate order, but absolute order. That is nature’s condition of peace. When man insists on order he is playing nature’s game. His agreement to play it is called law. It is a platitude of human law that it is not made to establish justice, but to establish order as the first step toward justice. We don’t make vehicles keep to the right to bring justice, but to bring order. The traffic cop over there at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue isn’t maintaining justice. He is maintaining order. To take him away would result in a frightful mess. To me it would symbolize Anarchism. As I make it out you want a world without the traffic cop. Isn’t that it?”

“Were you ever in a prison?” she asked me.

“No.”

“It is too bad. Probably you have thought of yourself as educated. And yet you never have studied jails—so important a part of your beautiful system of order. Never mind. Some day, perhaps, every one who presumes to believe in jails and other appurtenances of order will feel obliged to go and look at them, as you might feel obliged to know about the furnace in your cellar—they are very interesting. The point is that they have a lot of what you call order. The human creatures in them are in quite orderly rows. Their souls are squeezed in a quite orderly way—by the yard, by the ounce, and by the clock. They symbolize something, too—you are greatly interested in symbols.



They do more than symbolize—they *represent* your beautiful order. They do in a precise and systematic way inside a boundary what your beautiful order does outside a boundary wherever it is spread—pinch, exasperate, stultify, and malform the individual. This is why I don't worship your foolish traffic cop. This is why I would send all your policemen to find honest work."

She leaned toward me with her two elbows on the table.

"... I watched your traffic cop the other day. What do you suppose he actually was doing? Was he arranging the currents of travel for people on foot?—people who were independently carrying themselves over the surface of the earth? Not at all. He was wind-milling first to one welter of limousines and then to another, leaving the poor devils on foot to scramble as best they could."

"You have forgotten the street-cars. We don't all ride in limousines."

"But I haven't forgotten the people on foot. Your system is always forgetting them. And they are most of us. The system builds up a thousand artificial miseries that call for policemen—armed policemen. Government invents one withering restraint after another, then points proudly to its machinery for applying the discomfort. It takes a holy joy in its new thumb-screws—and calls them civilization. It is as if a man were to equip himself with a beautiful, tight steel collar, and then chuckle smugly over discovering a kind of tube that would enable him to go on breathing.

"As for that pretty contention of yours that man is part of nature, surely no one ought to deny it, least of all the Anarchist. It is precisely because the Anarchist wants man to have his *natural* liberty that the trouble has come. It is government—church government or state government—that has set up this idea of nature

*and* man. And having done so it goes about inventing a ghastly system of barbed-wire entanglements called laws. You talk about democracy. The best you can show is a pitiful travesty of the natural democracy of nature, that natural democracy in which the individual meets pressure, but a pressure that is a natural mass pressure instead of a discriminating, artificial, goading, separating, class-creating, greed-supporting 'law' pressure. Nature's laws rest upon all with perfect impartiality. They make no millionaires. They establish no slums. They organize no bayonets to keep them apart—to multiply the riches of one group and to deepen the despair of the other."

"Very well, then"—she had me forward now on the sharp edge of my chair—"let us go on with your mass pressure. You recognize that as final?"

"Social pressure is all-sufficing."

"Then let us imagine a hundred of us on a small island. We agree that we shall sleep at night and stay awake during the day. We have to come to some agreement. We can't have a committee—they would be policemen—but we agree on this elemental matter. What would happen if one of the members began practising on a cornet at two o'clock in the morning? I'm not joking. I'm taking this as an elemental problem."

"Social pressure is all-sufficing."

"But it would not be violent. You wouldn't lock him up?"

"He would feel the pressure."

"But suppose the first application of the pressure rather piqued his sense of the whimsical—supplied him with a genuine incentive—and that at three-forty the next morning he began playing again."

"He would feel the pressure. He would react to it. It is unthinkable that he should not. You are building up a trivial allegory with your present law system in mind and with all the habits and impulses resulting from

the present law system in mind. It is droll, but it is not reason. Go to the nature that has no codes. Its liberty and its resulting peace are perfect."

"The jungle!" I cried. "That is what I see. I don't see peace in the jungle. I see the large beasts devouring the small beasts. I see conflict, selfishness unrestrained. I see the injured—the most innocently injured with the rest—crowded to the wall. I see life a constant struggle with aggression—an endless fight for subsistence, and classes—an endless multiplication of classes, favored groups, the strong kept strong by their strength, the puny kept puny by their relative weakness. That is what I see in codeless nature. Then along comes your Man. He has an Idea—after a while. His idea is that it is foolish to spend his whole time in conflict. He organizes himself and reaches agreements. Even before they were written down these agreements were laws. When his group grew large enough, too large for his standing vote, he chose delegates. That was a legislature. Isn't it true that your social pressure must be *voiced*? Even if you take our hundred million—and Anarchists, I assume, would multiply—you must have some recognized medium for your social pressure. There must be no doubt about the voice or you would be spending your whole time in a fruitless effort to find out what your sacred social pressure was saying. If you could hear readily enough the pressure-voice of the small group—if a quarrel at a corner as to right of way was to be settled by the elements of social pressure immediately at hand (and I hope the voice wouldn't be fifty-fifty while the whole crowd was halted)—what would you do about a question calling for a social-pressure voice from the whole hundred million? You couldn't have delegates. You couldn't have a ballot, or even a single vote-teller who would go about among the whole hundred million getting their social-pressure opinions. You couldn't have any social-pressure ma-

chinery, for that would be government. You couldn't have a chairman for your hundred-million group. A chairman and committees are what we have now. We call it government."

I rushed recklessly on.

"You spoke a little while ago about the trade-union. Hasn't the trade-union a government? Could it have done the big things it has done without a government—without elective chairmen and committees? And if this necessity is admitted, is there any way of avoiding the chance that one organized group will not come in conflict with another? And if we have a largest government—the elected machinery of the total group—isn't it necessary that the voice of all of us should rule over the voice of some of us? If forty per cent. of your social pressure says one thing and sixty per cent. says another, has Anarchism invented any way out that will rebuke neither majority nor minority or give both what they ask? And is it reasonable to set aside order by representation, as in our present system, because the representative is so often stupid? Isn't our government really as good as we deserve, considering the mood in which most of us do the selecting of the representers? And is the cure no representing at all? Is the alternative to poor government no government? Is the alternative to a weak policeman no policeman? Is the alternative to a specific cruel rule of order no rules of order? Is the alternative to a leaky roof no roof? Is the alternative to a badly built track no railroads? Is the alternative to a defectively voiced social pressure no voice for social pressure?

"If Anarchism were at once accepted for the whole earth, wouldn't you at once have to set up government? Aren't you organized now? Isn't your office, here, organized? When you write and lecture aren't you using an organized language—a code of speech—not because you may love codes, but because you love to be under-

stood? Government is the language of social pressure. If government is cruel it is because the social voice behind it is cruel—and it often is damnably so. The Church is as weak as the people who don't go can make it. Jails are as bad as we make them by never looking at their insides.

"This is the way I see it: You . . ."

"Oh, you see it tremendously," she said, sharply.

"Let me get it out," I said. "As I see it, you are not only charging the whole muddle against our present method of interpreting what you have called social pressure. You are doing more than that. You are not like the Socialist or the I. W. W. You don't say to the man wearing a brown suit, 'If only you would wear a blue suit all would be well.' With you it seems to be not a question of how your social pressure is to clothe itself. You seem to want it to be naked. You won't have any system. Your social pressure is to be expressed God knows how, without a language, without a sign, and *your* social pressure is, somehow, always to be unanimous. Every one who is not an Anarchist seems to have discovered that a single thief in New York can impose locks on two or three million doors. You tell me there would be no thieves if there were no laws. You have convinced me that you are not joking. And right there I find you most puzzling, but most human. For your theory that no system at all would cure everything is, to my thinking, the same thing as saying that a different system would cure everything. I find everybody ready to blame the system. To admit that individual human creatures might have any defects seems to come hard. If there are weak, selfish husbands and wives, let us abolish marriage. If there are thieves, let us abolish political office. If there are hypocrites, let us abolish the Church. It is for all the world like lining up a bunch of lame men and crying out, 'This system of having legs is a failure! Abolish legs!'

"And all this time poor humanity, blundering along on the road to that ideal of happiness—"

"Wait a moment," she said, a finger pointed straight. "Wait a moment. You have asked a great many questions and arranged a very pretty picture that is, I suppose, intended to present a profound dilemma. But I'm going to content myself with considering one word you have just spoken. You say 'happiness.' You say it as if happiness were the imperative. The supreme need is not happiness—"

"Then in Heaven's name what is it?" I demanded.

"The theory of happiness as the supreme need has led to all the trouble. The preposterous theory about happiness has brought on the very tortures that have destroyed the happiness of the world."

I suspected her of knowing that I would be puzzled. Certainly I must have reflected that condition.

"With the theory of happiness as the great ultimate well in hand, authority rises up to say how we shall get it. Authority says, 'I know what will make you happy.' It arranges its systems and says to us, 'Now, damn you, be happy!' Happiness is *imposed*. It is to be clamped on like a strait-jacket or pushed under our noses like an anesthetic. Authority clanks over the crushed souls of men to swing open the gates of a wonderful cage in which mankind is ordered to be happy. Shuddering martyrs at the stake have died because they misread the prescription for being happy. Happiness has been administered like serums in an army. And this not merely by state authority, but by the reflected horrors of small group persecution. The family imitates the state.

"No! A thousand times no! The elemental need and the ultimate need are not happiness. The elemental need, the spiritual imperative, humanity's great desire . . ."

"Humanity's great desire!"

I repeated the words in a magnetized curiosity.

"... the utterly essential and imperative desire of humanity is not happiness, *it is self-expression*.

"Do you gather the differences lying in the recognition of that imperative? Do you get the difference between a fundamental necessity and—"

"But *happiness*—"

"Happiness." She gave it a mincing sound. "Happiness! . . . What is it? It is a dream, a name, an illusion . . . at most, of course, an effect. No. The need for self-expression, the need lying in the fiber, in the soul of everything in that nature you talk about, the need written in every living form and every part of every living form, the need sighing, singing, gnawing, struggling, aspiring throughout the whole cycle of created things, is the need for self-expression. You don't ask the flowers to be happy—you ask them to be themselves—each, utterly in its own way. You don't think you can enforce or confer happiness on the natural creatures of the world except by letting them be themselves. Man chatters about the smiling sky or the happy birds or whatever other fool patronizing thing comes into his head, then turns about to invent a new kind of handcuffs for his species. About ninety per cent. of his energies and about an equal proportion of his imaginative faculties are spent in devising and applying intrusions and restraints and machinery of murder. And mind you, he is always ready to rant about *happiness*. Oh, he has an absolutely incorrigible devotion to happiness! He has been ranting about it ever since the first slave collar was forged. But . . . you must be happy as you are *told*.

"Your wretched word sums up the whole case I have to offer you. I want self-expression rather than the brass slave collar of 'happiness.' There is my sin! I want self-expression for all the creatures of the earth *on the terms they can naturally make*—without diagrams

invented by self-appointed viceroys of an impossible god. I want the mother to express herself in a child, though it be with torture and without rewards she ever may label happiness, because that is her self-expression. I want the child to express itself in its own way, getting out of itself the thing that grows there and that will, without interference, have its natural beauty, its inevitable adjustment to the beauty of the world. I want the artist and the laborer to express themselves. I want each alike to own the thing he has made, and to share alike in the benefits to be derived from what they have made. I want humanity to have direct contact with nature and with itself. I want Man to be his own man.

"This is why I am an Anarchist. This is what Anarchism means. Every individual opposition to the existing order of things is illuminated by the spiritual light of Anarchism. It is the philosophy of the sovereignty of the individual. It is the theory of social harmony. It is the great, surging, living truth that is reconstructing the world and that will usher in the dawn."

I stared at the faintly flushed face of the Anarchist woman, conscious of a fascination—and a profound disturbance.

"And this," I said, "is the great desire of those who would live without law."

"Of those who would *live*," she said.

She spoke . . .

## XI

The nurse says that I may write.

She accedes as if to imply that my wish is one of those vagaries of the semi-horizontal and but recently quite horizontal which on the whole it may be better not to thwart.

She is not a young and beautiful nurse such as one



sees in pictures. She is plain; utterly plain, except as to her eyes, which are big and kind. She has no sense of humor. Absolutely none at all. Her work shows all the precision of a person with no sense of humor. Perhaps this characteristic is not unfortunate in some ways. In others it is rather detrimental; for humorless people always talk more than they should. Not that her words total a great number. Her volubility is undoubtedly an effect rather than a quantity.

Her name is Brackens.

She is not the nurse I saw when I opened my eyes to the thing that had happened. That was Miss Fogarty, who has a ruddy face and a high bosom. I think that Miss Fogarty and the doctor people rather thought at first that I was a hopeless mess. The fact is, the bump that shut off the lights of Union Square has scarcely left a bruise. And only one wretched little bone is broken in my foot. So that there is something grotesque about this complicated fussing. My foolish foot has become entangled in an immense institutional machine and holds me helplessly to an infinite ritual of preservation.

Miss Fogarty had a way of not telling me what they had thought when I was brought in. I guessed readily enough.

When my aunt arranged for the private room I came into the hands of Miss Brackens . . . and supplementary doctors. All of them interesting, but particularly old Karp, who is bald and has a wen.

It was Karp who said, "The simple fact is that you are *tough*."

"And if I had achieved this little hurt in a trench," I said, "and you were a soldier doctor, you would promise to get me back into the fight in two weeks, wouldn't you?"

"Make it three," said Karp.

Probably I looked annoyed. "Nature is very deliberate."

"If you had taken that hint from nature," suggested Karp, "you wouldn't have been knocked down by an auto."

Naturally people preach to a man with a plastered foot.

"You see," I said to Karp, "those ranters made me furious . . ."

"Shouldn't let them. Inciting fury is their business. Why do you suppose they go soap-boxing and platforming? To stir up. Not your kind, of course. The riffraff—they make a great hit with the riffraff. You probably looked the crowd over. People who won't read."

"But they say print is capitalistic."

"Bosh! It costs money to print *Dame Nature*, doesn't it? And *The Herd*? They're always howling for money, these ranters against capital."

"Have you read them, doctor—*Dame Nature* and *The Herd*, for example?"

"I don't want to. Skulking enemies of the Republic, that's what they are. They are bacterial—breeding discontent and active evil."

"They're very earnest."

"They're as earnest as an assassin!"

A pinkness had crept into Karp's bald space.

"Anyway," I said, not without a little friendly malice, "you can see why I might have been stirred."

"That's why I say, keep away from them. . . . Stop thinking about them."

I didn't say to Karp that just at this juncture in the world's affairs we can't "keep away" and "stop thinking." Things must be thought out and faced out. Unless the war is to be wholly an evil we must learn to stop some of our dishonesties. Keeping away from certain things, refusing to think about certain others, turning our backs on the "riffraff," has left us a disagreeable heritage . . . and not a few horrors.

This came into my mind when I was walking homeward, saw the crowd, and heard the crest notes in the waves of a voice. Two days before I had seen Anna Jassard, and had left unfinished in this journal some impressions of that meeting. The Anarchist woman still occupied my thoughts, poignantly most of the time, like a sharp effect of indigestion. There were moments when the memory taste was like an opiate, quieting ancient fevers of irritation. At others I felt a strange uneasiness, as if all that had seemed solid ground were suddenly to be suspected of a squirming unreality. The humanizing of the woman had somehow unsettled everything else.

Nevertheless, I thought I should never again be so easily trapped by a bigotry.

I thought this until I caught some of the words of that speaker in the square.

Of a sudden, then, I found that irritations return.

It was not the story of Syndicalist Russia, in which that restless crowd took such evident satisfaction, that cut through my resolves. Perhaps I shall never again be so sure about inevitable forms. If production armies are to be managed by the followers instead of by the leaders, that is a matter in which results may be awaited. But the sneers at the United States hurt. The answering murmurs hurt. It hurt that this protest against conscription should reveal a deep hatred of the whole system labeled by the flag. I shuddered to think of all that is hidden under the iron roof of order . . . of a bitter, festering repugnance toward the dream image of a nation, of the angry hands throwing insults at our smugly visualized conception of Liberty.

At last out of the long murmur of welcome came the voice of Anna Jassard. I knew it at once, though it was lifted to a strident level.

Two girls stood beside me in the crowd. One of them was startlingly pretty. Both were chewing gum.

At the moment when the Anarchist woman began to speak, the one who was pretty grunted, sharply, "I hope to Christ she soaks 'em."

I fancy the girl was disappointed. Anna Jassard picked her way with amazing caution. She preached no resistance to the United States of America. It was almost as if she had loftily cried, "Render unto Cæsar . . ." Yet I could feel as by a physical pressure the passionate rebellion behind that voice; I could feel the answering throb in the body of that crowd. The incident was a huge sarcasm. One of the foremost eulogists of "direct" methods was administering, in the guise of rejoicing for liberated humanity, an indirect incitement to individual protest. The thing that was happening in the speaker was happening in the crowd . . . alert, stealthy rebellion against an imminent process of the System. Deans and tutors, men in pulpits and in press galleries, are doing the same thing . . . surging furtively against the barriers . . . bickering and squirming in the face of a mass necessity that will refuse to be scowled down, that *must* refuse to be scowled down if it is to get anything done.

As muffled rebellion one might have taken it for granted. But in the red glare from the East, in this hour of anxious hush, the spectacle had the feel of a thinly shielded fire. Words scorched like scattering cinders.

I realize now that my fury was out of all proportion to anything said. I only know that the crowd suddenly became monstrous . . . that the speaker suddenly seemed to issue as a prodigious menace, flinging purple poisons, cooing like a witch, and flashing the blade of subtle assassination.

I am not sure as to the passage in her speech that drew me in at last.

"Yes . . ." I was shouting it at the utmost of my voice as if to cut a way through the crowd . . . "Yes, but how about the women and children of Belgium?"

My shout did actually make a cleft in the crowd. The two girls beside me shrank away, staring. I became conscious of the lane of faces running between me and the woman.

"Have you no decent name," I bellowed, "for those who go to the rescue? Is there no difference between the blow of a murderer and the blow of a defender? Is there no such thing as righteous force in your world?"

The shifting of many feet and a guttural murmur, punctuated with sarcastic laughter, drowned me at the end, . . . and the woman was holding up her hand while her eyes singled me out. I knew, despite the blinding excitement of my own noises, that she recognized me.

"I will tell you . . ." Her voice arose above the murmur and stilled it. "I will tell you . . ."

But I knew that I was no heckler. It was not realization that turned me about. Perhaps it was plain cowardice added to the sense of a futility. I felt enveloped by resentment, drawn in a murky tide. I struck out, plunging back through the outer wash of the crowd . . . more laughter following me into the open Square.

Then came the car. I spun half about. But not quickly enough.

## XII

Looked at from a bed, Sarah has presented a wonderful picture. It was interesting to fancy her as a nurse—what a bedeviling phantom she would become! Add a special sympathy in those eyes of hers and you have magic at its meridian.

There was a little of breathlessness when first she came . . . reaching for me with her look, and very discreetly and composedly taking my hand to say, "Well, old man, hard luck!" She knew better than to make much of the affair. There was nothing heroic in it.

Aunt Paul said: "It was so original of you, Anson,

not to be killed. You have had all the emotions—the ‘lights went out,’ as you say—yet here you are with only a plastered warning. Really, it was downright clever.”

“Downright agility,” I said, finding a new position for my foot.

She brought a funny yarn yesterday about a remark by a man who was run over . . . also a jar of a certain marmalade.

My glance at the jar induced her to laugh.

“It will help make you feel at home,” she suggested.

“You act,” I said, “as if I had had a fever or a baby or something.”

“Call it anything you like so long as you make up your mind to sit back for a while. What does the doctor-man say?”

“He says I am tough.”

“With a brittle spot, like Achilles. Very well. I’ll take you home as soon as you can hobble.”

“You wanted to beat me to that suggestion,” I said.

“I wanted to keep you from being restless.”

“Don’t you know,” I said, shaking a finger at her, “that the world is all wrong? That nobody should be coerced into doing anything—that each of us must do precisely as he chooses—that there shouldn’t be any traffic cops or soldiers or conscriptions or brutal intrusions or restraints of any kind—?”

“I see,” said my aunt, with a grin. “It was a sort of foot-note to all that, wasn’t it!”

“Very kind of you to sit there making puns of my misfortune, but it hurts like the deuce sometimes. I mean the foot.”

One has to growl a little to one’s aunt. . . .

With my mother it was different. She pretended that she had run down to the city not because my affair really was serious, but because it was about time for a little visit. She wanted to see what the Red Cross

people were doing and perhaps to carry back with her something inspiring from the spectacle of the work on a big scale. She has taken my bed in the apartment and has had a droll way of saying that I must not hurry the time of leaving the hospital, as this would cut short her visit.

The same dear old Mother—the same dear *young* Mother. Why do artists always give Mother such a dreadfully grandmotherly appearance, when they don't suggest the great-grandmotherly?

She seemed to make the air electric with her enthusiasm. She was enthusiastic even about my foot—such a remarkable foot *not* to be broken more and to be so quickly mending. She is enthusiastic about the prodigious things the United States is going to do in the war.

“Your father,” she said, “is beginning to count up the Academy boys who are in the Service. It's a wonderful list.”

Ah yes! And his own boy. . . .

Zorn came with a queer, anxious frown. There was something wrong with his tie, as if he had been interrupted in the act of getting it on. He was transparently pleased to discover that I seemed to be in my right mind and approximately assembled. It occurred to him to read a couple of Rudley's letters. I think that for a moment he intended to read a third. Possibly I shall hear this later. I wondered whether my situation helped any psychic faculty and whether I was right in feeling that the letter he didn't read was one in which Rudley acknowledged Zorn's stroke of benevolence. Afterward the impression seemed not to imply any psychic faculty whatever. It was plainly a natural guess.

Suddenly Zorn said, “Did they arrest the driver?”

“Yes,” I said, “so I have understood. That was wrong. He had all the right of it.”

Zorn frowned contentedly. "Now I know that you aren't really hurt."

Presently he added, "I'm going to move."

"And stop being my neighbor?"

"Stop being your next-door neighbor, yes. But I sha'n't be so far from you—once again over Stuyvesant Square way. You shall visit me often, I hope. A snug little place. Without Robert, you know, that apartment is foolish—and an extravagance. When he comes back . . ."

He didn't finish the sentence.

"I shall be one of your earliest callers at the new place," I said.

"Not until the foot is quite well. You have been wounded—"

"And not for my country!" I said, crabbedly. "I—"

"Perhaps we shouldn't say that," Zorn flashed back, with a checking action of the long hand. "I know how you feel. It doesn't seem heroic—"

"I'm not eager to be heroic," I protested. "But one hates to be idiotic—"

"Nevertheless, Mr. Philosopher, you weren't about such a bad business, as I make it out. Voices as well as guns are going to be needed before this war is over."

"I know," I said. "The business may not have been any worse than futile. I'm not entirely ashamed of howling in the Square. But I didn't need to lose my head afterward."

"Never mind," returned Zorn, with his grimace. "You seem to have picked it up again."

It was just after Zorn had gone that Miss Brackens handed me an envelop. The fragment of paper inside had this in pencil:

May I see you for a moment?

ANNA JASSARD.



No nurse in the world, if she knew it, would let any patient in the world see a visitor whose announcement was so appalling as this seemed at that first instant.

"Miss Brackens," I said, with stupendous firmness, "will you please tell this lady that I am very sorry? . . . No. Wait a moment. . . . Tell her I'm very glad . . . that I should like to see her."

And I have paraded myself before myself as incorrigibly logical!

## XIII

"You know," said Anna Jassard, "I was a nurse once—a long time ago."

I looked at her—intently, as if to get through the surface of her and find the ministering one. She sat beside the bed in an attitude of utter quiet. That chin seemed modified—to be not at all the chin of that street meeting. Her face looked again as it had looked when we began talking at her table. Yet the ministering one was not visible. The fighter unarmed—that was what I saw. She had said, "a long time ago."

"If you have been a nurse," I said, "you know that the only matter we could talk about would beget conditions very bad for the patient."

"I have been a patient, too," she said, "and I know that certain things do not hurt. For example, it doesn't hurt to know how sorry any one may be. It won't hurt to tell you that I didn't speak twenty words after you had gone, for I knew that something had happened. I couldn't go on. They told me that my challenger had been knocked down by a car. I had a way of finding out how it was with you here—that it was not a dangerous matter. I have had news since. To-day I wanted to see you—to say just this much, and to assure myself that—that you are going to be all right."

If she didn't mean this she is a consummate deceiver. But I couldn't feel that the fact was of any importance.

She is human, and I believe she is honest. She may be one of the kindest persons in the world. The man who sank the *Lusitania* probably never committed a private murder. Mere sedition may well reek with altruistic emotion. . . .

She was standing now and looking down at me with that dreadful patience.

"Thank you for coming," I said, blankly. She understood. She understands everything personal—everything except the All-of-Us idea.

"If you will say what you are thinking . . ."

"I am thinking that I am your host and that I mustn't say what I am thinking."

"Better get it said," she went on. "It will do you good."

"You mean that it wouldn't hurt you—that you're going straight on with this business."

"I mean that we're both trying to express ourselves truthfully and fairly."

"Perhaps it was like this," I said. . . . "That what you said at the meeting was only remotely connected with what happened to me. Really not connected at all. My stupidity was a purely personal exploit resulting in my being gathered up by the System you hate, and carried here. . . ."

"I don't hate anything kind in any system."

". . . But the sort of thing you people were saying will make a lot of difference to thousands of men who are doing real things. It will help tear the hearts out of them and scatter their bodies . . . in frightful fragments. . . ."

She shook her head slowly.

"It is because we don't want hearts to be torn out—"

"I know, I know! But that's what it will *do*!"

"Good-by!" she said. "Will you shake hands? You know, *my* heart may have to be torn also."

"Good-by!" I heard her walking quickly down the corridor.

## XIV

Having the Anarchist woman come might have appeared like the climactic thing. But to-day—to-day, after my fat aunt promised me that I might to-morrow begin enjoying at home the remainder of my little calamity—I had the real surprise.

When Miss Brackens, with the faint flame of maidenly curiosity burning in her seasoned professional eyes, said, "Miss Sherrick," I am sure the reaction must have afforded her a real reward for the attention.

"Miss Sherrick?" Very likely it had a do-you-mean-that? sound.

Miss Brackens nodded and wondered. I am now no sort of an anxiety and she is enjoying with a purely elemental playfulness the scrutiny of my phases. One could read quite easily in her face the thought that this Sherrick person, whoever she was, had made a definite impression.

I was incredulous up to the moment when Laura came to the door of the white room, until she stood there questioningly . . . or defiantly—which was it? I asked myself.

It seems now rather droll that I should have met the Anarchist so boldly and that here I winced in a kind of stage fright before this so much milder image. At least I knew what I wanted to say to Anna Jassard. For Laura I had no words. I was dumfounded. If my aunt is right, everything I felt was written for my visitor to read, as plainly as on a printed sheet.

"I don't blame you for being astonished," said Laura.

I was glad she didn't say it gingerly, in a sick-room spirit.

"To take away all the mystery, I heard of it last night from Lawrence Pine."

Pine, of course. I had forgotten Pine, though he was here twice, and behaved beautifully.

"You look," said Laura, "as if that didn't take away all the mystery."

"My looks are a nuisance," I said.

She laughed, and just as a piece of music it was as perfect as the color of those outrageously blue eyes of hers. Everything about her made me hate to stumble upon anything disagreeable. I wished she would go and leave me the image and the laugh.

Yet I knew that she would stay until something happened. . . . I could see Sarah standing at that apartment door and turning to me her white chagrin and dismay. The other door, and Laura going through to Rudley—I saw that door by which she was to be shut out. . . .

"But you are better, and you're going to be quite all right?" she said from her chair.

"Quite all right."

"Will you let me say something?" she said, her knees crossed and chin in hand. "I know you think I'm queer. You may have been kind enough to wonder why I disappeared."

"I did wonder."

"Of course I should have written some sort of word to Sarah. You see, it is quite a story. I sha'n't bother you with it now. Besides, I really mustn't. The part I mustn't tell is a government secret."

"As bad as that?" I said, incredulously.

"It is because it is that kind of a story that I *had* to disappear."

"You are becoming very melodramatic," I said.

She laughed again.

"It has seemed that way to me more than once. I guess that it was a melodramatic decision I made—that I *had* to make. I found out that those people I was with—as secretary, you know—were busy in an ugly way . . . about the war . . . about the United States. I

think you know that I was against the war, against everything about it. But I'm an American, too."

"I'm glad of that," I said.

"Of course you're glad. Well, I couldn't go on. Besides all that, I became a bit frightened. They had been very kind, those rascals. I thought it best to run away. I packed myself off to an old uncle in Virginia, 'leaving no trace,' as the Germans say. At least I thought I left no trace. I didn't want to be questioned, and I knew that in other cases there had been a good deal of questioning. Then one day a very nice soft-spoken chap with an innocent-looking mustache met me on the main street of my uncle's stupid old town. He told me without any quibbling that I had been followed, that the government had some unpleasant but absolutely imperative things to do that would necessitate my assistance."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "You were in for it."

"Well, the rest of the story I had better not say anything about, even to a patriot who gets himself hurt denouncing sedition."

"Denouncing your friends the Anarchists," I amended.

"Poor Anna Jassard! I'm afraid they will get her yet."

"I'm afraid they will have to," I said, unable to restrain a gesture. "I'm sorry. I like her. She was here to see me—"

"To see *you*? Lawrence Pine told me about your meeting her—"

"Yes. She saw what happened. I think she's honest. But her doctrine won't fit into a war time. It's out of key. It's sabotage. You know sabotage is called a religion by the 'direct action' people. Until the war is over . . ."

"I know." Laura looked sadly through the near window.

"You Individualists . . ." I began.

"Anson Gray!" she cried, suddenly leaning intently toward me and putting a hand on the arm of my chair. "What is the matter? You don't hate me as an Individualist or anything of the kind. You're not miffed as the brother of a girl whose friend had to disappear for very good reasons, or even for no reasons. There is something else. What is it?"

"Women have wonderful imaginations," I said.

"It doesn't require great gifts to see what I see."

"What do you see?"

"I see that something is wrong."

"A great many things are wrong," I said. "The world is sick."

"Oh, bother the world! I'm thinking about . . . ourselves. Right here and now."

"We shouldn't do so much of that," I said, smugly. "We should be wiser to think of greater matters—for example, of those who are over there fighting for us."

"Good God!" she cried, an astonishing color surging into her cheeks, "don't you suppose I am doing that? Don't you suppose I'm thinking of Robert . . .?"

She halted abruptly.

"Robert Rudley?"

"Robert Rudley. Isn't he worth thinking of?"

"They all are worth thinking of. . . . He will do big things. I believe it. I sha'n't chide you for thinking of him. I couldn't know . . ."

She drew back, peering at me with a queer, kindled look. Her lips twisted in reflection of an emotional struggle. She put a hand to her hair, then clasped her fingers in her lap. The glow of her was so different from anything I had seen in any earlier scrutiny that I sat in a stupor of incredulity, with something uneasily expectant plucking at my insides.

Her hands were flung wide as I remembered them in her summing up of New York as "a dear old fool," and she came out with it.

"Of course it's silly that you shouldn't know he is my brother."

"Your . . . Robert Rudley your brother?"

Her smiling relief gave her a new effect that might have been interesting in itself, but that came to me mostly as a huge irritation.

My first impression—it may be my last—was of having been needlessly tricked. I could see only a fantastic blunder and useless belittling anxieties all growing out of a trick—a juvenile whimsicality without possible palliation used to trap and confuse and humiliate others. A recollection of Sarah's face at that door made the face now before me seem cruelly insensible to its crime.

Probably I looked rather dull. I was indifferent to any explanation. I was sure that there could be no explanation that would be adequate. I was sure that any analysis must add disfigurement to the already ugly fact—if it was a fact. A preposterous, selfish theatrical trick.

"Are you sorry?" demanded Laura.

"A moment ago," I said, "we used the word melodramatic. I had no idea then that anything so astonishingly stagy . . ."

"Please go on!" she exclaimed. "Say something nasty. I *want* some one to say something nasty. It will be a satisfaction. You can't overdo it, really. I have no doubt you are precisely the one to—"

"To say it in the nastiest way?"

"To give it the punishing name. Whatever you say will be mild compared to what I have said of it myself."

"It is true, then? This is not another trick?"

She winced without removing her eyes from mine.

"Of course it is true!"

"And why are you telling me. . . .?"

"I don't know . . . except that his going away has changed everything—me into the bargain. And some-

how all the little personal things begin to look different to me. I don't know that I can explain it."

"It is the war."

"That may be. But everything is different."

She arose, walked over to the window, and stared into the street. The sun slanted across the old blue and violet of her spring hat and splashed into the creamy round of her neck. Through the V of her gown I could see that she was breathing deeply. The difference that was affecting her seemed to be shining in the visible form. She may not be sobered, but she is softened. As she stood there, sprinkled with the pale gold of the sunlight, her eyes narrowed over the liquid blue, her lips parted as if to draw a new purpose from the sky or to release the burden of pent emotions. I seemed for the first time to be seeing her as a woman creature with a sad and beautiful lonesomeness coloring her pride, her eagerness, her struggling individualism.

Though the interval was of but a few moments, it sufficed to admit, like a flood of hot metal into the mold, the Zorn story of her girlhood. Brief as the story had been, it seemed suddenly to fill the space of past days, though it left so much of newer motive unexplained, and so greatly accentuated the present mystery of that silhouette against the sick-room wall. It was easy to be sorry for the daughter of such a father, but sympathy can be critical. It evaporates at a point. I suppose some of the things I had said about her were kicking around in my mind.

"Why don't you say something?"

She turned upon me with a flashing look.

"I was thinking," I said.

"I wish you would say it. I'm sure you are wrong. How could you think rightly? You don't know. You sit there theorizing about me. . . ."

"I know some things," I said. "Yet I'm frightfully ignorant about you. I don't know, for example,



whether your changed name means that you have married."

"My changed name means nothing of the sort. I took my mother's name."

"You make me feel as if I were cross-examining you, and I have no right or desire to do that. I wish you wouldn't jump at me. Can't you see that I'm convalescing?"

"Oh, come!" she flung at me, seating herself again. "I know what you're thinking."

"Go ahead, then. If you say it I sha'n't be responsible."

"You've figured me out as a wayward person—one of the modern freaks—I could tell by the way you looked at me that first night."

I insisted that this had been admiring curiosity.

"Rot! It wasn't contemptuous, exactly, but it was combative. You were rather against me. You know that. By the way, you said just now that you knew some things. What do you know?"

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Zorn?"

"The man who had the apartment with Robert? I never saw him."

It was thus that I came to tell Zorn's story. She listened with an intentness that made me stumble more than once. To see the weight of every word making its mark was like writing with a pyrographic needle. It forced me to the baldest sort of narrative. Besides, much of it was her own story. I could feel that she was comparing it with the acrid circumstances as she knew them, that my fumbling recital was stirring long-quieted emotions. I could see her going back, and returning again to what I was saying. And what I was saying was as soon over as possible.

Curiously, the thing that trailed off at the end was a sense on my part not of anything trivial in the family cataclysm—I hope my own more comfortable upbringing-

ing will never make me insensible to the acute pain of such tragedies—but of an inadequacy in the whole affair, bad as it was, as explaining the escapade of the chucked-out daughter. I found myself getting ready to resent her explanation of that changed name and her denial of her brother. For I felt quite clearly that she had done the denying. And all this while the sheer beauty of her was like an embarrassing white flame.

I knew at the end that there was to be no tirade of justification, no odious plea for understanding. I wasn't quite prepared for her next move.

She let me finish without interruption and sat for several seconds without a word.

Then she remarked steadily, "I believe this person Zorn might understand."

She could scarcely have said more pointedly that she was doubtful of me.

"I'm sure of it," I said.

"He would see it all—even the foolish part. I want to know him."

"He will be tremendously glad to meet you. I'm sure of that. And astounded—if he hasn't known—"

"Known what?"

"That—that Robert's sister was so near him."

"He wouldn't know that. Robert wouldn't have told him. . . . No, he wouldn't speak of it."

"I assume," said I, "that this was not because he had a passionate love for mystery."

"No one had!" she cried, with a stiffening gesture. "It happened and it had to go through. Robert understood. He was pledged. You would think it absurd. Maybe it was. But he understood. Even after all this time—just back here in December. . . . I was in that apartment—"

"I know."

"You know? . . . Of course it was possible. I knew that. I took the chance. You saw me?"

"Sarah saw you."

"Sarah . . .?"

This melted her—and rather finished me.

"I thought it best to tell you that," I said, "because I want you to go to Sarah before you do another thing. Knowing it, *you* will understand some things better."

She stood up as if shaking clear of a burden. A different look came through her wet lashes.

"I'm going," she said, extending a hand crisply.

"Though you haven't really explained anything to me," I said.

She had given my fingers a vigorous clasp and moved away. She turned for a moment. "Explain? What's the good of explaining? The big thing is that I'm through with this damnable subterfuge. Can't you see that? Besides, we've talked too much. I'm a brute. Good-by!"

By now she has seen Sarah.

## PART SIX

### *The Burden*

#### I

TO be back again in the old room where I can look out upon Felicia's window and sometimes see Felicia herself is to feel that one dissonance at least has melted in the flow of established harmony. Mother's threat to run home when I should leave the hospital was not carried out, because Aunt Portia Rowning intervened with a gracious invitation to Park Avenue, where mother is never happy, except for the space of talk-times with her brother, but where she achieves a certain characteristic amusement in watching the wheels of my aunt Portia's feverish machinery.

The invitation seems the more gracious when you stop to think of this crisis in Aunt Portia's career; for just at the time when the United States, government and people, are looking to my aunt for guidance in the matter of the war, with something bewildered and imploring in their solicitude, here comes a fresh crisis in suffrage. Portia Masterson Rowning is convinced that the unscrupulous suffrage crowd is bent on some supreme, irretrievable deviltry when she isn't looking. So that she is obliged to conduct the war with eyes constantly alert for the sex treason that would deliver the women of New York, and Heaven knows how many other new states, to the abysmal horrors of voting. I have no doubt there is something exhilarating in the very complexity of these protective functions. My aunt is like one of those prodigies of the telephone switchboard who never come out strong until a horde of voices

is clamoring for connections. You read of girls who, when the town or the building is on fire, calmly call up the pivotal persons and institutions, summon, warn, head off, and adjust until the chair burns under them. There you have a picture of my aunt, with the world ablaze, coolly articulating the bones of the body politic, performing miracles of administration, and incidentally blocking would-be looters of the ballot.

But the great thing that has happened is Sarah.

That meeting with Laura must have been rather a remarkable spectacle. Aunt Paul was not here when it happened, so that I have no report save Sarah's. From this I am at liberty to gather that any picture I formed was in a fair way to approximate the fact.

Because they came together without observation I can fancy that the whole process was quicker than it would have been under other conditions. There need have been no fencing. Laura is a straight hitter, and she left me to go straight after a definite business.

Despite the relief, the protestations of affection—and the tears—I'm sure that Sarah began by gulping down an annoyance. She was bound to feel, as I did, that she had been needlessly duped and humiliated.

"You know," she said to me, "how exasperating it is, in a play or something, to have people floundering around like a lot of blind puppies, or gasping and wrangling over a fool quibble that could be brushed aside if only some one would say a simple word he persists in not saying? You get the feeling that it's all just to make a plot and you want to take the writer by the neck and shake the nonsense out of him. When it happens with real people doesn't it seem a little worse—at first?"

I agreed.

"And yet when you know . . ."

"But I don't know."

Laura, it soon appeared, had poured forth the whole thing to Sarah, quite in a woman-to-woman way, with

all of the woman side of that domestic tragedy out of which rose the hard figure of old Rudley, like a hulk of weather-stained granite in the green of a New England field. In fact, some such revelation was indispensable to any answering of the basic question. There was, indeed, in Zorn's translation a vivid picture of all that led up to the disintegration, but the daughter had been a vague element. She had been simply the daughter who went away as the son did. One might make anything he chose out of that.

Sarah was a fine picture of sympathetic scorn as she recounted Laura's final scene with her father—a scene which Robert Rudley may have omitted from any narrative to Zorn by reason of the obligations of the peculiar compact which followed.

Old Rudley, it seems, had hurled out something about "his name." He is the kind of man who would do that with special unction.

"Your name!" cried Laura. "I'm through with it. You may keep it. It isn't worth the frightful price you ask a daughter to pay for it. I'll take my mother's name. It will fit me better and please me better. If you ever show any disrespect for my choice"—I can imagine how significant she made this!—"I shall feel compelled to explain why I made it."

By this stroke the young rebel was to erase Laura Rudley, quite wipe her away like an image on a slate.

Chance must have favored her; otherwise the mere change of label and the change of scene would scarcely have separated her so completely. Chance and the holding aloof instinct that discards rebels when they are feminine. Brannington does not track its people. It simply sits alert, like a cat, listening. But much escapes even the best listeners. When Laura went to New York there was an end of knowing anything about her. A man like Joe Gradish might come back with a report of suspecting that he had seen her on a Fifth

Avenue bus—with a man who was far from satisfactory in appearance. A man was indispensable to such a report. But Gradish had not been positive about the girl. He was an indefinite person; a great trial to his wife, who was always sure of everything, particularly if it was unpleasant. . . .

"The matter of the name," I said to Sarah, "doesn't seem to me so important in itself. What I can't understand—"

"Of course," interrupted Sarah. "How could you understand unless you had been told? Probably you frightened Laura into—"

I laughed. The idea of frightening Laura seemed quaint enough.

"Unless you knew how Rob Rudley hunted her up," Sarah went on, "and how they fought out what was left to them, you wouldn't get it at all."

"Did they fight, too?"

Sarah's look seemed to suggest that this was to be regarded as cynical. Yet she was forced to justify me.

"That was a terrible part of it. Though it wasn't like the other. Not at all. Parent and children—perhaps we ought to expect that might happen. But brother and sister!" Sarah looked at me steadily. "We scrap sometimes. But we never have fought, have we?"

"Except that day in the barn," I suggested.

Sarah winced. I, too, had a twinge. That had been a terrible thing, that quarrel in the barn.

"We were kids then. I don't mean that. You've never been that way since."

"Thank you," I said. I should be glad to think I had never been that way since. To myself I said, "Nor you, either." Yet this may not be true. Sarah might go as far again under sufficient provocation.

"The trouble was," said Sarah, "that Rob felt responsible for her."

"Naturally."

"And naturally she wanted him to mind his own business. He hadn't done that very well."

"Most of us don't."

"She wanted liberty and she was going to have it. She was always sorry that she told him he was as bad as his father. She didn't mean it. She knew better. He is not in the least like his father. But she said it. He caught her by the shoulders. 'You mean, then,' he said, pretty savagely, I suppose, 'that you just want to go to the devil.' 'I mean,' she told him, 'that I'm tired of *belonging*; dead tired. I'm tired of being anybody's daughter. And it seems I must refuse to be anybody's sister. I can do that, too. I want to be myself. I'm going to be myself. The world is moving that way. Women have become *persons*. Can you understand that? You go your way, don't you? I'm going mine. You can call it anything you like. If it gives you any comfort to call it going to the devil, take it. I've had a little of hell. I know the worst.'"

There were words bitterer than these, for Rudley held on. In the end she shook herself free, and Rudley, rather dumbly angry and miserable, retained but a few shreds of all he had clutched. The strange bargain was of her making. She was to be utterly cut off. She wanted that. She wanted the feel of being cut off, of arranging her own world and seeing what might come of it.

"For how long?" he asked her, beaten, his back to the wall.

It was so much as if the matter were to be reduced to writing that she laughed, and this was part of the mischief. It led him, in a fury of resolution, to nail the terms when they came.

"Oh, let us say five years."

In his beaten fury he thought of nothing at last but of making the foolish compact literal. He was not to know her. She was Laura Sherrick, an unencumbered



person, a Lady of Fortune (this was a phrase that had cut him sorely), with a fixed purpose of getting acquainted with the world without an introduction.

So much for the father's work.

I have no doubt that neither of them stopped to think how childish this bargaining was. Laura's ranting against man-intrusion was a blind plunge upon a highway to nowhere, as when a prisoner escapes, urged not by a destination, but by the bars that are left behind. Rudley's part was a matter of man-pride. A father's brutality called for chivalry from the son and brother. And when chivalry spoke it was snubbed. It was almost as if she classed him with his father. This he made her understand. The thing she never had hoped to make him understand was that, in her mood of those days, the motive for man-intrusion made no difference. She wanted liberty from man-government, affectionate or otherwise. She had theories. She had no objection to being a woman, but she had acquired, God knows how, a prodigious prejudice against being a female.

Perhaps it is on account of this prejudice that we can have a City of the Successfully Single. Woman has been trying to arrange things quite in the spirit of a notation describing a certain variety named in my butterfly-book: "Sexes not essentially different" . . .

Rudley's absences in the West doubtless made the long separation less artificial than it might have been under other circumstances. He had his own way of knowing where she was. And there had been rather cool letters. When he settled at his engineering work in New York he contrived to meet her alone, making it very clear that he was no person to break a bargain. The meeting at my aunt's apartment on the night when my suspicions of their acquaintance had been aroused was, by Laura's admission to Sarah, a real thriller. . . .

Then came the night when she went to see him. Evidently she herself didn't know why she did it. I

fancy the flame of her defiance was burning rather low. It appears that to give herself a last debate she avoided the elevator and walked up-stairs. In the first flight she thought she would see Sarah. In the second she fixed on going to him. In the third flight she was back again to Sarah. And so on. It was just as she had decided to see Sarah that she turned and touched her brother's bell.

Of this talk Sarah received very little; at all events, very little of it was given to me. My impression is that Laura was getting ready to arrange terms of surrender, and that Rudley had the hard luck to blunder . . . or at least to say something (implying Sarah, I fancy) that didn't give the happiest effect. There was no smash, but *rapprochement* was delayed. It is probable that he went to find her before he sailed. Certainly he would have written. But her disappearance had made either contact impossible. When she learned that he actually had gone a full sense of some things caught her by the throat. . . .

To-night I looked into Sarah's room (I am hobbling artistically) and found her bent over a letter. When she turned her face I saw some things in it that were not painted by the amber shade of the electric globes.

"To him?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Me, too."

And to-morrow is drawing-time in the great lottery. To-morrow is soldier day.

## II

I am 1455.

The finger of Fate was leveled impressively, and a great voice has shouted the number across the hills.

A dramatic thing; a hundred million-odd looking on with awe, or a grin, or a shifting inattention.

I am 1455, and well to the front of my district numbers. Clearly I am drawn in the first of the draft.

The number begins to have a fascination. It has a sound of history. In 1455 Mohammed II was in Constantinople and Alfonso Borgia was becoming Pope; Gutenberg was printing the first Latin Bible, Fra Angelico was dying in Italy, and Britain was beginning an ugly war with a beautiful name—The War of the Roses. It was an ugly war, but not so ugly as this one. Surely not. History has no war so ugly as this one. Any man who has seen another die of the gas will believe that, I am certain.

Yet even so ugly a war cannot kill beauty. Perhaps only the ugliest war could build a background for supreme beauty. I am not thinking of the beauty of this Spring which glows in the crevices of the city. The caverns are spattered with green gems. There is a heightened color in life. . . . And the robes of Spring are trailing meanwhile into the very flames of war. . . .

I am thinking of the glad spirit of service; of the proud volunteer, and the conscript with his "Ready!" stirring in the mass; of the awakening conscience of a people; of the new luster in the flag and the kindling crimson in the cross; of the new light in the eyes of those who hear the tales from that front overseas, told in the passion of courage; of the wonderful mounting beauty of Idealism, shining faintly but largely and growing hour by hour more superbly majestic in the nation's sight.

I am thinking of the beauty that will ultimately drive out the crawling shadows in trenches and in brains, that will wring sympathy from selfishness, and arouse in the soul of the race a New Desire more penetrating in its vision, more persistent in its convictions, more compelling in its splendor than any the world has known. . . .

## III

I go proudly to my humiliation, because I believe in the thing to be done. It is a chapter to be lived.

"You won't do." There will be a way of telling me that, and I shall pass on to the work for which I will do.

But I may not take this for granted. To the United States I am a name and a number. The name and the number must be made visible, palpable. We have come to the times of physical contact. Physical contact is the basis of the trouble. Things of the spirit are not postponed, but they are not all in all. The spirit tenants a body, and the body has its affairs. Just now its affair is conflict.

Alonzo is drawn. Owen Drynd trails in those last numbers that belong to the deferred. I learned about the cobbler's son when I carried a shoe to be mended in accommodation to my bothered foot. Old Drynd seemed vastly relieved, though skeptical of the future.

"The young fool isn't satisfied!" cried the father, hoarsely. "You'd think he was cheated by not coming at the top of the list. Of course they wouldn't have taken him, anyhow—with a wife and baby. Would they, do you think?"

I didn't know. "To-morrow and after we shall understand those things better."

"Ah yes! To-morrow. Did you . . .?"

He looked at me uncomfortably.

"Yes," I said. "They begin sizing us up to-morrow."

His eyes followed me to the door with a curious pondering intensity. It was as if he had fetched some fresh mood when he released his black pipe from the quartet of sound teeth in the left of his jaw.

"And yet, by God! we'll smash the Beast!" he shouted after me.

"I'm sure of it!" I shouted back.

By way of sarcasm there is the scene in the Marriage

License Bureau where couples are scrambling into wedlock to cheat the call. In all the history of the war this will count as the most pitiful thing. The great picture has to have its shadows.

## IV

"Hurry up, there! You'll be late for school!"

A grinning old man, stooped over a cane, with several soiled newspapers under one arm, piped this salutation as I reached the step of the stern brick building to which 1455 and the appointed crowd of his compatriots had been summoned.

The joke was enjoyed by a group of children, now remotely of the school and loosed for the summer.

I think the old fellow must have stood there long enough to get the full effect of the foregathering. The school-house had a gaunt way of seeming to share the awkward feeling of the intruding citizens under thirty-one, who shuffled about with noises that were, like their bodies, too large for the place. The man-sounds echoed discordantly. There were gruff titters about the low desks and benches. Such a place has, in fact, a kind of comic austerity under out-of-season circumstances, when there is no frowning principal on the platform, no hovering teachers to express the limits of liberty, and men of the world are shuffling irreverently in the hard ruts of Education.

Within the street doors the steps on each side turned toward a common landing leading to the assembly-hall. Beyond, on three sides, were the class-rooms, like empty cages, many inexplicable doors, and one door that soon acquired an immense significance. This was the door through which the men went to their examination. Behind it were the doctors. It was in the far corner, leading to a wing.

The Draft Board official sat at the principal's desk; an

amiable man wearing a gray alpaca jacket, a cool-looking silk shirt, and belted baggy trousers. When I encountered him he was trying to relight a cigar that had burned very short, so that he had to use extraordinary precautions not to singe his nose. A hulking chap, well past six feet, offered a fresh smoke, but this was declined with a little-finger gesture (during the lighting process) that said very clearly, "No gifts!"

The willing, the indifferent, and the unwilling were all about me, and not by any means to be identified at once. Bits of talk between acquaintances often gave some indication of the attitude of this or that individual toward the ponderous grind of the system.

"Say, Eddie," remarked a stocky boy to his companion, "better keep away from the winder if you want to get by with that bum ear."

"I've been smoking too damn much," declared another; "and I'm afraid my heart is very bad."

"The hell you're afraid!" chimed in one of his group.

This brought the inevitable laugh.

"Mike," said a lank boy who was excitedly chewing gum, "you know you can git off for red hair."

"Well, I can tell yer this," said Mike. "Bein' a bonehead won't save *you*."

"Oh, I'm strong for goin'," protested the lank boy. "All I'm afraid of 's my feet."

"They *are* too big," said Mike. "You're right about that. And they'll be bigger before you get through."

"What is 'flat feet'?" asked a sallow man with wiry black hair and shifting dark eyes, who had a handkerchief tucked under the rim of his collar.

"Let's see," answered Mike. "Put up your foot."

The questioner did as he was told.

Mike examined the member critically. "Wonderful! Ye have the foot of a gineral. You're born for a soldier!"

"An' him with three kids!"

"An' you with three wives!"

"An' me only three days married!"

There were others in the chorus and fresh gusts of muffled laughter.

Beside me on a waiting bench was a youngster of a clean cut, manly type, with an earnest mouth, and wistful eyes that roved now and again to the doctor's door. He was intent and motionless save for fingers that folded and refolded a scrap of paper.

I wondered about him. What were his hopes or fears? No trouble in this era to imagine any one of a thousand things about him.

Suddenly, as if in the crisis of a resolution, he turned to me.

"Would you think that a trick here—with these doctors—would be dishonorable?"

"A trick to get out of it?"

"No, no!" He said this without indignation, yet with a quick emphasis that had a burning quality. "A trick to get in."

"I would expect that your motive was honorable," I said. "That ought to go a long way. Of course, if you concealed anything that would make you a burden afterward—"

"I don't see how it could make me a burden afterward," he said, quietly, as if measuring some chance.

The word "honorable" had sounded so fantastic in this particular setting that I found myself a trifle at a loss. Yet it fitted the face and the voice. And, oddly, it had not really sounded sentimental. It was the right word; surely it belonged to the concerns of the moment, however widely this phase might be overlooked. I concluded, nevertheless, that he might have worked himself into an emotional anxiety that was groundless, if he was not deceiving himself into believing that medical examinations were a grotesque kind of confessional conducted at dueling distance.

"My impression is," I said, by way of safeguarding him against any foolish pretense or in some measure against disappointment, "that when these doctor folks lay hands on you they will find out the facts, whatever they are."

He turned to me squarely and whispered, "Do you see anything wrong with my eyes?"

"No," I said, quite truthfully. They were, in fact, an exceedingly handsome pair of eyes. I had had a bit of experience in being deceived by eyes.

He nodded gratefully.

"The left one is nearly gone. . . . Not the sighting eye, you see. It doesn't matter at all. Why, Roosevelt has lost the sight of one eye. Would any one say . . .?"

"Later on—" I began.

"Ah! That's all right! Later on. It might be blamed on anything later on. Anything at all." He brought his face near to mine. "My mother wouldn't stand for my enlisting. And now I've got my chance. You see" . . . he lowered his head for a moment and folded the piece of paper into a minute wad . . . "you see, the girl wants me to go. I've *got* to go! It will be a great thing for me, in every way. . . . Every way."

"Does the girl know—?"

"About the eye? No." He seemed to shrink at admitting this. His lips drew together sharply. "It came on since I've known her. But she's the kind of girl who wouldn't care about that if it happened—if it *happened*, you know."

"I see." It was to be a badge of honor if it *happened*. Poor lad!

"They wouldn't side-track a man for that—if the game was on. Plenty of men—"

"Number eighteen ninety-four!"

He sprang to his feet. "My number!" he cried.

"Best of luck!" said I. If they didn't test his eyes separately . . .



A chap on crutches passed through the door in advance of him. There was an impressive contrast in the two figures. The figure that followed him was that of an alert person who had been seated with another at a little distance. He carried his right arm in a sling. I had heard the expression, uttered in a low voice, "It's a cinch!"

The returning figures had varied ways of emerging. Some hurried away. Others dropped back into groups they had left, exchanging jokes or whispering accounts of their experiences. Mostly they were a stalwart lot, accentuating the discords of the sling or the crutch.

"Good stuff for soldiers," I said to myself—a National Army in the period of gestation.

One thing was apparent: not all of them knew the results of the examination.

"Guess I'm all right," grunted one grinning husky, grasping the hand of a predecessor who had been waiting. They linked arms cheerfully, lighted cigarettes at the door, and went down the steps together.

"How about it, Mike?" challenged one of the Irish lad's friends.

"The old one kicked a little on the baseball finger," said Mike, "but I told him it was all set for the trigger. And listen here, Skinny. Go over there and drink four glasses of water. Ye'll be weighed in. Don't forget that."

Skinny obeyed.

The young man on crutches hobbled out and went his way. When my companion of the bench came out his face was set. His look spelled failure. He was for passing me without a sign, as if not trusting himself to do otherwise. Then he caught my glance, shook his head, and strode on without looking back.

Very soon after came the arm in a sling, a very different face accompanying this. . . . A face I now recognized as one that I had seen somewhere before.

The author of the opinion that it was a cinch got up

from one of the desks where he had been reading a newspaper. The two heads came together. Here was satisfaction. Nothing could be more disgustingly plain. As the two moved away I peered again at the face. Almost at the same instant the man of the sling fastened upon me an extraordinary look. The fusing of those glances lighted up the case. He was the man of the roof and the revolver.

There was something malignant in the first flash of him. . . . Astonishment, and then a bitter fighting look, followed by a sardonic change that ended in the nastiest imaginable smile. He knew and I knew that I had saved a crook from the honors of war.

It seemed to me that he hurried at the steps. Was there really a surviving injury? Had there been a bungled setting or had some faked effect been brandished for the hour's purposes? It didn't matter. He was free of the draft for the present. The National Army was saved of one rascal. . . .

"Number fourteen fifty-five!"

It was part of the ordeal to feel the stare of all that remained there in that hall . . . to feel the stare follow me to that door at the heels of one of the biggest of the conscripts, who shot a queer look of recognition over his shoulder.

The thing that followed was as brief as I had fancied it would be, yet wholly different from anything I had pictured. My first bewildered impression was of a naked boy, and of another, half dressed, turning upon me with a petrified incredulity. . . . Of a funny pause in which I could form no notion of what I should do, because no doctor was visible.

At last the bald head hove in sight . . . Old Karp, letting down his fretted look, and advancing upon me with an annoying radiance.

"Well, well! Upon my word!"

Suddenly, then, he commanded me to be seated on

the only available chair. He became very stern. His glowering didn't fit very well with his next movement, which was that of dropping upon one knee before me.

"Let me see your right foot."

"It's quite well," I said. "As good as ever."

"Young man," he remarked, with a deepened sternness, "in this place doctors must be obeyed." At this he reached down, unlaced my shoe, and slipped off my stocking with a firm, quick gentleness.

"Trickster!" I thought as his fingers moved over the flesh he held in his hands. My face was burning.

"Too bad. A fractured phalange, remarkably well set, and handsomely healed. But the foot will require care for a long time—some months. It must be favored. Marching on it would be simply impossible. I'm very sorry. Let me see your card."

I fumbled for the card. He went to a near-by table, scribbled for a moment over his record slips, and handed back to me the card, indicating that I was privileged to restore my stocking and shoe.

"Thank you," he said, still with his stern manner. "The record is properly made. Take care of yourself. Particularly," he added, when my head came up, "keep away from Anarchist meetings! And"—he decided upon a further amendment—"please convey my profoundest respects to the—eh—portly lady."

"You mean my aunt?"

"Your aunt, yes. She is—eh—very charming." He put his hand on my shoulder. "You can't object to my saying that. No. And remember that I shall want to see that book."

"There are more important matters now!" I grunted, defiantly, at the door.

"The world needs good books more than ever," he called, cheerily.

I don't know what freak of the brain, working in the fever of that transit to the street, loosened from the

darkness, in ironic blackboard letters, that phrase out of Ephesians—

*The desires of the flesh and of the mind.*

My sudden impression of these words was as strangely vivid as those of the Psalmist's singing line:

*The man goeth forth to his work.*

V

My aunt knows how to take these things. She is never by any chance at all mawkish, either in what she says or in what she leaves unsaid. She simply understands. She has an understanding laugh—which is very rare. A laugh can be an immense cruelty, perhaps the most scalding of all audible things. Aunt Paul's laugh, though she can do anything she cares to do with it, is capable of wings. I can fancy her as a kind of Winged Sympathy. . . . A trifle bulky for sculpture, but certain to be impressive.

While she laughed at my narrative I knew that she missed no shade of significance in that scene at the school-house. She asked many questions. For instance, she wanted to know about nationalities. Were there obviously German men in the group? Had I thought of the trying position of American-born sons of German parents? And Mike, was he a typical Irish lad, or a much-Americanized sort?

Oddly, she did not laugh at Karp's message of respect. "The old dear!" That was all.

Sarah had a speech that sounded very venerable and prophetic: "No jugglery matters. We shall all be in it one way or another. I've been reading about England and France. . . ."

Yesterday I went to find Zorn in the street off Stuyvesant Square. I discovered him at the corner, standing

with a group of boys in khaki. When I discerned his black figure I slowed my stride, hesitating as to the expediency of a strategic detour. He was speaking vehemently. It was possible to hear, in an exaggerated kind of stage whisper, the words:

"Yes, you are willing to give up your lives for your country. Of course. I know that. But are you willing to keep away from women for your country? That is what is going to count big on the other side. Tremendously. Do you know . . ."

I veered to pass the group, from which there was no sound that gave the flavor of the response to this exhortation, if there was an audible response.

Zorn caught sight of me and hailed me with a gesture while holding to the end of something he was saying.

"Some boys I know," he said to me later, "as well as an old man can know boys. Good fellows. Very wise about everything but the future. All chances look alike to them. That's youth. Wars are made possible by old rascals who look forward and young rascals who don't. It's a blind game, take it altogether. As blind as a draft lottery."

"But that has to be blind to be fair," I said. "And Justice, being blind, couldn't see the joke of calling me." I felt the need to talk with him about it.

He turned upon me earnestly.

"Were you drawn?"

"Drawn and dismissed," said I.

"Of course." He said this absently; then caught himself up. "I mean that it had to be so. I'm sure you were ready. If you continue to be ready to help, the need will find you."

He went through with this platitude without zest, adding, explosively: "It would be the same with me. Can't you see that it goes by a logical mechanism?"

"I'm not complaining."

"No. I don't say that. Maybe I'm reasoning with

myself. When a weapon of righteousness is to be swung we all want to clutch the handle."

By this time we were at his door. He lives now in a shabby house; on the third floor, with his belongings huddled in that curious, orderly confusion which I had remarked in our next-door days.

"Much cheaper," he said. "We must think of these things. The war will cost a pile of money. A thousand causes, all hitched to the one cause, will want money. We shall be buffeted a good deal by the storm, whatever we may do. To begin with, you and I belong in the ravaged No Man's Land between the rich and the poor. We shall find it hot under our feet before long. Do you know," he went on, "nothing new is happening. We are simply getting the mass effect of individual traits. The war is an eruption of something nasty in the blood of the races. When the sore is cauterized by suffering humanity will be better."

He was sitting tentatively and uncomfortably on the corner of a chair covered with papers, turning one of his somber cigars as if in debate as to the proper end.

"We say that war causes horrors. But horrors cause war. That's the thing we've got to learn—horrors of ignorance, and lying, and theft, and vanity, and cowardice. The Nietzsches didn't produce the Prussian spirit. The Prussian spirit produced the Nietzsches. The world should have guessed that sooner. If the Prussian atrocities suggest the bestialities of Grimm's folk-lore tales, and you say, 'The amputated hands and the blood whimsicalities are all in Grimm,' remember that the Grimm fantasies *are* folk tales and part of the fiber of the Prussian imagination. Each people carries its sins hidden until the appointed hour. Poor Russia found that a whole people couldn't be kept in darkness. The religious mess in the Balkans couldn't go on festering forever. England couldn't go on swanking through the world without stubbing its arrogant toes against the

bones of the past. The United States, with its paper patriotism and loose-jointed complacence, couldn't indefinitely escape the need to fold the thumb of purpose over the fingers of capacity and bring down a real fist."

He illustrated this image with his own wiry hand, then arose to answer a knock at his door.

I heard a woman's voice and Zorn's low responses. The talk on the landing continued for some minutes.

When Zorn came back he seemed to have picked up a new text.

"Oh, we'll find our fist!" he cried, with a despairing note, "and we'll forget some things altogether. The forgetting will go with it. Take a case like this. Here's the janitress of the house. She lives in the basement. A Bavarian woman. A clean, kindly soul. Think of her. Bred to revere the motherland. Brothers in the German army—in particular the great, handsome brother who is an *offizier*. And now her son has been drawn and accepted in America. Nothing novel. Just an average case. I suspect that he goes cheerfully. Plenty of his friends are going. It is the great adventure. But the woman. There are hundreds of thousands of her here. And she must listen day after day—well, to the kind of thing I have just been saying about the amputated hands and the ingrained bestialities. What do you suppose this will do to her dreams? You can't stamp out the love of mother-country. You can't tear out the roots of a blood bond. And what do you suppose she asked me at the last?—crying through it—whether I thought it would look proper to have a service flag on a basement window! How are you going to measure the courage and devotion of a woman like that?"

"We shouldn't forget her. But the courage and devotion of the altogether American—"

"Yes, I know!" he cut in, impatiently, "yet we are as we are. Only the past *is*. We've got to begin with

that. We've got to begin with what is behind Mrs. Stieger's service flag. And go on."

The truth is that Zorn is obsessed by all sorts of complexities growing out of the pull and scramble of the war. These seem to have come to him in a great variety of ways, but mostly, I suppose, by his habit of hearing cries wherever they sound. He made it clear that he is apprehensive, that he sees dark places ahead; that the remoteness of the battle-line cannot prevent terrific upheavals in life here.

I expostulated. I argued that there would be tremendous readjustments, but that one might easily exaggerate the vital side of the calamity. There will be compensations; not compensations that can justify war, but that may go a long way toward mitigating its dreadfulness. I tried to point out some of these compensations, with the result that his irritation increased.

"Do you read?" he demanded with an excoriating sharpness. "Do you know what is happening behind the lines on the other side? Do you think that by some happy quibble we are going to escape everything that has happened to *them*? Do you realize that only fragments of the misery get into print? Do you think our people are going to be able to stop at the point where the thing gets to be ugly, like a bunch of Cook's tourists on a slumming jaunt? Do you think the whole story is acted at the front? 'Our heroes.' Yes, yes! But a dead son is a dead son."

And so on. He was in a devastated mood.

What a contrast in Nelson Variot, whom I met a little later prancing away from one of the clubs across Our Square! Spick and span in his khaki, wearing a wonderfully new officer's cap, all agrin, with that absolutely academic stride and movement of the shoulders that proclaim him as quite of the moment. There had been Plattsburg and all sorts of luck, including the present leave, a country-house affair on Long Island, and a cork-



ing dance at the Ritz. Variot's foreground glittered. It was easy to see that.

Or consider Moorell, who used to edit the *Fish Hook* in my day, and who took a notion to ask all of us who had been college compatriots of that notoriously brilliant staff to come and see him married in his new naval panoply to the rich Miss Trayson of Spokane. Miss Trayson, who crossed a continent to meet Moorell at the altar of Grace Church, is one of those brides who seem, even in the crisis of the ritual, to have difficulty in concealing a conviction that the whole thing is exquisitely funny. For that matter, there is something amusing in the idea of Moorell marrying any one. Though his being an officer may be even more quaint. . . . Moorell, with his delightful irresponsibility, his provisional attitude toward all obligations! And it may be that the brevity of Moorell's prospective honeymoon—at the last his time of leave had been cut to forty-eight hours—struck the merry Miss Trayson as a particularly good joke. Anyway, there they were in the sunlight of Broadway—laughing like two happy children. I never saw a more luminously blissful pair. That word "death" in the altar pledge had slunk by without showing its head.

To laugh—like my aunt! It is a great gift! We need soldiers who can laugh. Moping is a kind of treason.

## VI

Pine can laugh, and, though he scarcely could be used to fortify any general proposition as to the virtue of laughter—not if I had opportunity to introduce certain strongly qualifying arguments—he does it rather well. He has the optical advantage of very good teeth and the oral advantage of a pleasant enough note. Of course his laugh lacks conscience. It isn't cruel, but it is fundamentally lawless.

There must remain for me always a deeply bitten image of that group of them—of Laura and Sarah and Pine as I saw them thrown together in the evening light. I resented Pine specifically because I wanted to get the effect of Laura and Sarah together. These two had seen each other on several occasions recently, but always when I was absent. Their being together still had the reunion flavor, an eagerness of recovered possession that brought to both the glow of an emotional interval. Though they were amazingly unconsecutive, as girls are likely to be under such circumstances, it was interesting to hear them as well as to see them. Without being discordant, Pine was an intrusion.

Yet Pine filled a place in the picture. Somehow he seemed mentally to be setting them in relief—to be emphasizing their difference—as effectively as he marked them off physically with his snowy suit. At present laundry rates that white duck was a huge extravagance for Pine. When I saw his flowing white silk tie I wondered if he had thought about his White Girl. Sarah wore a dotted Dolly Vardenish frock that made one think of something in the shepherdess way. It averages a sort of pink. Laura did not have the Russian-blouse style of thing. She may have shed that Greenwich Village symbolism. I liked much better the pale olive dress, which incidentally made her seem slenderer and emphasized the beauty of her neck.

Possibly Laura is prettier than Sarah. I can't tell. I wondered what Pine thought. It was exasperating to consider his privilege. When he looked at Sarah he had the glint of a thrilled appreciation. Not that he has a devouring glance. Whether by art or instinct, he looks as he speaks, with an assured naturalness that gives him, I fancy, an actual charm. He has a species of gentle boldness that belongs, it may be, to a certain breed of man after a certain habit of life. His manner with Laura reflected this trait to the point of habituated

confidence. I thought he took her for granted, which occurred to me as damnable.

To Sarah he is a new kind of man. Perhaps only the elementally old in a man can seem new to a woman. As I reviewed them it seemed to me that there had always been Pines, while Lauras and Sarahs are new. If this is an illusion it may be that eyes are hopelessly sexed. The integrity of the equation may be restored when people marry. The assumption is that the pollen of newness rubs off and that the two find themselves back again at the starting-point. Or let us say, we marry the newness and find oldness in the package. (Hazen used to put it that marriage is often a green-goods game with one real bank-note on top.)

Pine inspires cynical speculations. On his part I am sure he has thought of Sarah as a new kind. But he will marry Laura when she is through being a rebel. That is utterly clear, and she will be punished for a prodigious overvaluation.

I married them with my eyes as they stood there together at the piano and suffered a sense of pitiful calamity. "Mrs. Lawrence Pine." Good God! Yet she will deserve it. She has had plenty of time to look him over. She knows all about him that a shrewd woman can know. She has heard his "Desire of Love." If she likes that type he may please her immensely. He is honest enough, I have no doubt—if honesty and dreams are sufficient to go on she will be satisfied.

But why does she wish to dangle him before Sarah?

At one point I expected retribution for *that*. When Sarah failed me I was forced to feel the natural irony of the whole situation.

Pine was standing—he had just left the piano and had halted to quote a passage of that mournful Tagore—at the moment when something was said about the songs of battle.

"Mostly rot," he said, contemptuously, "though some

fine things will be done. It's a pity they had to kill that boy Seeger. He had the spirit of a real poet."

"And a real man," I suggested.

"Poor lad!" murmured Pine. "Blinded by a blood hysteria. Threw himself away. It was a crime."

"But not *his* crime!" I retorted.

"No. *Our* crime!" Pine flamed up. "Think of a civilization that will pitch souls like that into the muck of war."

"Some of them volunteer," I remarked, "as Seeger did."

"A horrible social ideal is responsible for that," said Pine, his face contorted as if he shrank from the spectacle. "It is ghastly. I can't think of it. It makes me ill. And this could be such a beautiful world!"

"But who is to defend the beautiful world?" I asked, savagely. "Who is to decide who shall not be pitched? Who is to hold back the precious right ones who must not be sacrificed?"

Pine laughed—acrimoniously this time. "The wonderful Draft Boards! Their wisdom is unerring."

"Of course as a poet . . ." I left this in the air. God knows he could have made a bitter answer.

He insisted upon laughing again. "It was the good Fates that decided that," he rejoined. "The Fates sitting beside that wheel in Washington."

"And we may sit back and enjoy the beautiful world others have saved for us."

Pine flung out his hands. "Let the natural fighters do the fighting. It is ordained that way. When enough of them hate it there won't be any wars."

He was unspeakable.

Meanwhile Laura was watching him with a silent intentness—utterly silent, with the faintest trace of a shadow between her brows. Like an accomplice. Even a cave-woman would have shown more spirit. The Individualists stand together.

As for Sarah, I will do her the justice to say that she seemed troubled. But she deserted me. Never a word of protest against this astounding mockery.

Afterward she explained to me that jumping on Pine had not seemed to her like a profitable thing to do. "You served the occasion rather well," she said. "Really, I couldn't have complimented you more than by letting you run the affair as you did. You were pretty rough—maybe insulting at one point. He has his creed—"

"Creed!" I shouted at her. "So has crime."

"—and he is utterly unfitted by the whole religion of his life—"

"Religion! You are going into the comic. I've never seen the slightest evidence of his having any religion."

"I mean that he isn't *adapted*. He would be no use at smashing anything. Just in the way. Why, Anson, you would be worth six Pines in a fight!"

This may not have been intended to be crushing, but it answered that purpose.

## VII

Wincher happened to mention the other night a certain famous painter who had placed on the wall of a room in his country house an immense picture-frame fitted with plate glass. The frame was adjusted to a sort of window-opening in the wall, and from the adroitly contrived point of approach the spectator saw the superb crisis of the Hudson's beauty—the thing itself, in whatever mood it might be.

The whimsicality came into my mind to-day when I looked out upon New York through a window showing a scene no painter would choose, unless he were one of those incorrigible realists with a passion for sodden things who can reach an exaltation in the presence of the drab.

To tell how I came to this window I must go back a

little, back to the week when this journal seemed to recede in the clatter and the Book wore the appearance of a pathetically naked keel in a deserted shipyard. (I did think of shipyards. Brakeley is working like mad in a shipyard somewhere near Philadelphia, where there is a babel of tongues, and where he is prouder of his overalls than any Variot of his gilded bar.)

This was about the time Sarah began to think about the Motor Corps of America. A wild thought, for, though she runs a car very well, there was at that time no immediate prospect of a vehicle. It is the privilege of heroines in this legion to furnish their own cars, and some of them steer sumptuous shiny tourers that cost the price of three or four very good farms. Sarah couldn't know that Aunt Portia Rowning, in a high moment, would offer a car. If it hadn't been Aunt Portia it would have been some other providential aid. Sarah was sure of that—surer than she was of the geography of New York. She always had abhorred maps. It is impossible to diagram anything for her. I fancy no woman can really understand a diagram. But she has some other sense, nameless and inexplicable, by which she seems to happen into the right way—or something just as good. After all, carrier-pigeons have no maps.

Sarah did, however, resort to a practical expedient. Without knowing what might be taught to accepted members of the corps, she hit upon the plan of subsidizing a chauffeur to belt Manhattan with her, which turned out to be somewhat of an adventure in itself, since the chauffeur was all but arrested for a lawless turn (or, to be more exact, for something he said when he was scolded), and came to the brink of a smash on West Street. I received the impression that Sarah did not approve of the way New York was put together. She had other criticisms, some of which led me to think that I should have to bail her out a good deal.

Nevertheless, she came home at last in her uniform

and was proudly saluted by my aunt. I told her I never had expected the novel excitement of kissing a chauffeuse. The experience was part of the preposterous revolution.

Yesterday she was called at 4.15 A.M. to take a lieutenant-colonel somewhere. She was out of the house in twelve minutes and a half. When she came home to breakfast (with a shocking appetite) her eyes were shining beneath the peak of her cap like twin sparklers under the lid of a jewel-case. . . .

Well, all of this couldn't happen without a lot of discussion and fussing, in the midst of which there was something of Laura, inscrutably contemplative as in the Pine incident; and Pine himself was visible at times—visible rather than audible at all moments when the air hinted of war talk. There was a visit from Uncle George Rowning and Aunt Portia, who were benevolently giving up Bar Harbor for the summer because Aunt Portia simply couldn't get her hands free of war responsibilities. When the Academy closed father came down for a week before going to a meeting of Red Triangle men in Washington. I was then working on a Liberty Loan committee and he had suggestions for this enterprise that gave me a new awe of his shrewdness. We went together to Camp Upton and to some of the armories and docks. He appeared intensely absorbed in the cubistically painted craft in the bay and rivers. He had a way of coming stock still at the curb whenever there was a parade or even a moving detachment of troops of any sort. His way of lifting his hat when the flag went by, letting the breeze stir his shaggy hair, had an impressiveness for me greater than any spectacle the street could hold. It was after some such incident that I noticed him walking absently along with his hat in his hand. He has his hat off to the war. He wanted to talk to recruiting-sergeants, and to stand in crowds before bulletin-boards with face up, listening to the comments. He peered at bunting and booths and

trophies; at a tank bearing a war spellbinder; at a gun under a tent before the Library; at the battle-ship rising out of the earth of Union Square with the Jackies' wash flapping impudently in the sunlight; at the French *poilus* and sauntering shore-leave sailor-lads, and at the kilties skirling in Bryant Park.

It was too bad that his visit couldn't have been timed late enough to permit his seeing Sarah driving a general. That stage had still to be reached when he went away.

My parting with him at the train left me strangely uplifted, tingling with a sense of vaguely imagined responsibility. I saw in this man who had just gone quietly about the good business that had fallen to him that shining Expectation which draws, from those who can feel, the utmost of response. All initiative, I told myself, is a form of reaction. Our boasted impulses are but lastly our own. The expectation of a people must always contribute a powerful incentive, yet I suppose the most powerful incentive for any effort, however it may lie muffled in the fibers of individual consciousness, is to be traced to expectation somehow personified.

I could not forbear thinking of what it would mean to this grave and gentle citizen, uncovered before the emblem, had he been permitted to watch a stalwart son in soldier livery marching into the fire-veined shadows of service. I had not then to think of all that Sarah was to do, and how well she was to do it. She could be recruited for bigger work than that . . . to the limit of opportunity. She is fit for anything. This man has a right to a real son, too—to a soldier son.

The thought gave poignancy even to so commonplace a sight as that of a boy in khaki walking by with a motherly-looking woman, bareheaded, wearing a gingham apron over a greasy gray skirt. I looked after them, followed them for a while, watching the woman's face as she turned it to him again and again while he swaggered with seemingly imperfect attention beside



her. Probably she was asking him a string of foolish questions that did not stir his interest. He would be thinking of other things or finding it hard to think in the same way about things that had been.

By this time I was over beyond Third Avenue. Finally I turned down-town where the Second Avenue trains growled and shrieked over my head, coming at last still farther east to find the First Avenue sidewalk almost impassable. Women, torrents and eddies of women, hatless and provisional of dress, carrying babies, pushing them in little perambulators or twisted by clinging shoals of them. Yes, I was far away now from the Successfully Single. . . . Children darted and squirmed through the interstices, laughing, squealing, throwing missiles, struggling with baskets or with smaller children. They swarmed about the legs of a great wooden horse half-way through the door of a harness-maker's. They dripped from the ledge of a soda-fountain where a pyramidal woman, enormous, enveloping, whom one could think of only as seated, was raucously gossiping with other women near by while she administered to the horde. Along the curb, stretching as far as the eye reached to the south, were push-carts, tightly wedged together, filled with vegetables and fruit, each after its kind—cabbages in one, onions in the next, potatoes in the next, peaches or bananas beyond, and so through endless iterations. Doorways between the shops were temporarily converted into stalls, giving passage to the floors above only by extraordinary contortions. . . .

As I turned westward again I saw the shoemaker's son, Owen Drynd, at the opening of an alley. Something about this boy had made a strong appeal. It was not simply the attitude of eagerness shown in that discussion beside the bench in his father's shop. There was an upstanding manliness about him, a clean vigor and frankness of look that darted to me as a thrillingly personal expression of the soldier instinct at its best.

It may have been the things that were in my mind, or a flash of something infectious in the boy himself, that gave me the sudden wish that he could have his way.

He carried his coat on his arm and had just reached to lift up a fallen child when he caught sight of me. There was a glance that told of a debate as to whether properly he should recognize me. I was glad that he felt assured—that he found the recognition waiting.

I halted before him, at the same time becoming aware of the length of the alley and the brick rear house.

"Ain't you lost?" he asked, awkwardly. "Away over here."

"I'm following the sun now," I said. "I belong somewhere over that way."

"My palace," he remarked, with a movement of the head that indicated the brick rear house.

"And your work?"

"Over just the other side of Broadway. Only takes me ten minutes."

"Better than hanging on a strap."

"Sure."

"I remember that you have a baby. Your father spoke of it."

He smiled aridly with another nod toward the alley. "M' wife reminds me of that every once in a while . . . when I say anything about enlisting."

"You still think of that?" I asked him.

"Do I?" His face changed. "Yes, I think of it. Why wouldn't I?"

"Of course. No one could blame you for thinking of it."

"She does." He turned half about and stared up the street.

"And yet you can't quite blame her, either, can you?"

"Maybe not. Oh no!"

"When a girl is tied down—"

"Oh, I hear that, all right!"

"It isn't as if she could go to work—"

"Work doesn't suit her, anyway. She ain't that kind. I ain't kickin'. I like her well enough. But she don't need to holler so much about it. Starts it herself when I read the paper. If it wasn't for the kid . . ."

"That's just it," I said. "The kid."

"It don't bother *her* much. She leaves it at her mother's 'most every day so's she can go to the movies. Sometimes she ain't here when I get home. No supper or anything."

"After all, Drynd," I said, "if you had the job of a baby you would like to break away—"

"Maybe I would. But the baby *is* her job, ain't it? 'Ain't I got *my* job?"

"What is your job? What do you do?"

"Uniforms now," he said. "They used to make rain-coats. But now it's all uniforms."

"You're a journeyman tailor?"

"No. I ain't a journeyman." He grinned. "I was in the packing first. Now I got a machine. Buttons mostly—and pockets. It's easy enough—and we get pretty good money now. I wouldn't care. . . . But uniforms . . . they get my goat. Know what I mean?"

"I understand."

The obsession made obvious signs in his face.

"I tell you when things get worse—when something happens—I won't know what to do. It ain't to go away from her, you understand. Everything was all right till I got to thinkin' about the war and seein' them go. And she'd get money. The pay is split up. Of course she'll say it ain't enough. I guess it ain't. But I know a woman who'll take good care of the kid. And she could get her old job in the paper boxes. Easy. And I'd have a chance."

"I've a better idea," I said.

"A what?"

"A better plan. You want to go."

"Sometimes I think I *got* to go!" He thrust his hands in his pockets with a jerk of his shoulders.

Afterward, I will admit, my impulse figured rather fantastically. At that moment it seemed quite inevitable. The fact is that he stood there as the essential image—ready, eager, capable. He could be that which I could not be. He would be not merely the form and mechanism of a defender, but the flaming spirit of fighting will. If I made it possible for him to go it seemed that it might be as if he carried with him something of myself. For that moment I was able to forget everything but the great shining thing that is not practical at all, it may be, but that belongs with everything that we must hold with our eyes. I could see a way of taking part, a way that would seem real. Such things had been done, though it is only since that day that I have recalled vague impressions of similar expedients. To have recalled anything at that time would not have mattered one way or the other, except as a help in arguing with Drynd. I could see only Drynd, with a great desire—not a Pine, or a Grayl, or a Mr. Crook or any other imaginable types not to be counted upon, but only the one who was ready and who spelled the Answer to that call from across the sea.

"Suppose, Drynd," I said, "that a man who can't go himself were to make it possible for you to go, in a way that would make you feel that it was all right to let him do it?"

He looked at me blankly.

"Suppose the man took your job and turned the money over to your wife and baby."

"This ain't a joke," he shot out, resentfully.

"No," I said, "it isn't intended for a joke. I'm serious. I'd be a fool to take up your work—"

"Do you mean *you*?" He took his hands out of his pockets and stared down at me with a new perplexity.

"Yes," I said. "I'm the man who can't go himself. I'm not the right size—and shape. You are. It would be a perfect bargain. It will be a great thing for my education. It will teach me about useful things. And I'll have a good time thinking, 'There's that fellow Drynd over there doing my fighting for me.' You see it would be just a swap. I ought to be fighting. I haven't any wife or baby. And there you are."

His lips moved, but quite silently.

## VIII

Naturally he thought I was a "little off," even after he had said, "If you ain't kiddin' . . ." and had been convinced of my seriousness. We sat on the steps of that back tenement, in the gray well among the houses gilded at the top by the late sun, and I argued some of the puzzled lines out of his face. Not by way of intensifying his wish to go. This was unnecessary. The whole thing began with my assurance as to this wish, and as to something fine in it. Yet there was his pride, and also certain little skepticisms; as to myself, unknown to him and to be looked at twice as a queer fish, certainly . . . offering to take a man's job and turn over the wages to that man's wife; and as to the wife, it may be. What would she say about this? How nasty could she be, money and all? Would the thing look crazy, to his father, for example—crazier than just going and enlisting and putting all the results up to Uncle Sam?

Even starting with the money as a real fact, there was the matter of showing why it was *his* job that should be the basis of the game. That surely would have a funny look, and I had to make this clear—as clear as it had suddenly become to me.

"You see, Drynd," I said, "I have my side, too. I must get something out of this—"

"How? . . ." This thrust him quite back again into mystification.

"I'm as honest as you are about wanting to do something. We both want to *feel* right. Now I could go and work at anything—in a shipyard or a munition-factory—and get money and turn that over."

"You'd get bigger money," ventured Drynd.

"I suppose I would, but it wouldn't be the same. I wouldn't have the same feeling. I don't think I could keep going quite so well. I don't think that it would feel quite the same to you. You'll be doing my work. I'll be doing your work."

"I see," said Drynd.

I knew that he saw something. His look began to make this plain. What I saw was a curious envelopment of the simple figure. It was for me as if a new image had grown there against the gray of that pit. The same Drynd, the same black-haired, deep-eyed, shabby-garmented boy of the alley, but with a light upon him—with a light *in* him. . . . A soldier, not made by machinery, but born from the soul of a people. A soldier who would carry a patriot's flame lanterned in a brave body. A soldier who made no bargain save the bargain that gave him liberty to serve. . . .

It is true that he changed markedly before me. It was natural that he should. The proposition was obviously queer; the person who made it was still obscure and, despite his explanations, still to be proved. Yet the proposition was there, pointing, pushing back the obstacles, or seeming to do that, and giving his imagination its first free outlook. And while he himself still sat, nervously thumbing a button on the coat that lay over his knees, his imagination seemed to stand, to straighten itself fully, throwing off in experimental daring all the hampering things, and to be looking with a half-awed, half-chuckling straightness into the future.

My notion was, I told him, that our little arrange-

ment ought to be somewhat of a secret, and this brought him around quickly with the question, "What would I say to her?"

What should he say to her? If he had been skeptical she would be more so.

"You might say," I ventured, "simply that your wages would be sent over to her every week from the shop. In many cases—"

He broke into a joyous laugh. "She'd never believe that! No, not Vicky! She'd know something was up."

What Vicky would think was, after all, the only reasonable excuse for a secret, excepting, perhaps, the shop. And, if it came to that, maybe the truth would be as easy and as satisfactory as anything else. Why not simply tell her the fact? We talked over this possibility. Perhaps it might seem more plausible, less freakish, less open to suspicion of a trick, if she were made to understand that this sort of thing was to be expected—that a lot of unusual things were done in war-time.

As to this—making her believe that anything of the kind might be done elsewhere—Drynd was doubtful. "It's awful hard to make her believe anything," was his summing up of Vicky. "But if she was sure of the money—"

He seemed to regret having let this slip out. "I don't mean—" he added.

"I understand," I said. "We must make her sure of the money. Isn't that it? Of course. It's like making the baby sure of the money, too. Anyway, I want you to think it over and we might get together again—say to-morrow night, at your father's shop."

He frowned with an uneasy shift of his shoulders.

"The old man—"

"We can talk it over together. If we're right he will be with us. I'm positive. I know about fathers."

"There's mothers, too," said Drynd. "The funny

thing is *she's* for it. Oh, nobody's stopping me, excepting . . ."

I followed his glance through the alley. A girl carrying a baby was hurrying in. The girl had a hat with a wide, flapping brim. Her yellow hair came forward in two spirals over her cheeks. Her skirt was very short. There were shiny buckles on her slippers. This is all I can remember of the way she looked then.

"That's her," said Drynd.

We arose. I had thought of Mrs. Drynd as up-stairs somewhere. There seemed to be an awkwardness about meeting her. I put out my hand to Drynd.

"Good-by," I said. "To-morrow night."

## IX

Drynd's father was the great surprise. "I knew he would do it," he said. He even appeared to take the son part of it for granted. It was my part that puzzled him; or at least that part saved him from the direct embarrassment of acquiring new terms with the son.

"A man might call you a damn fool," he said to me.

A man might. This was indubitable. Old Drynd seemed far from saying that *he* would. That was something to start with. I think he was less baffled when he found that I could laugh about it—that I seemed to be as elated as Owen.

We went over the affair as a matter of business. The shoemaker seemed entirely confident. I offered to leave with him a hundred dollars as a little fund to illustrate my intentions. But old Drynd brushed aside the suggestion.

"It ain't necessary, or right. It's bad enough for you to work for nothing. . . . You, no relation—a stranger."

"No relation," I said, "but not a stranger. There are no strangers in a war; only friends and foes."

"You're right—you're right!" He fumbled with his



pectacles and caught hold of my hand. "By God! That's true, too, ain't it? Friends or foes."

I was for leaving them together to have it out, but Owen hurried after me.

"She—she wants to see you," he said.

"Your wife?"

"Yes."

"How did she take it?"

"It was the way I said. She won't believe it. That's why she wants to see you."

I assented to going over with him at once. He was greatly excited in a quiet way. He was going into the artillery, he said. After thinking of it all night that was what he had decided to do. He didn't say "all day." I found out why before I left him.

He opened his door on the first landing confidently, with a kind of swagger. There was a staring lamp on a center-table with a bright-red cloth. The room had an unkempt tawdriness. There were loud-colored, spotty things in it. I remember a fearfully red rocking-chair, and a colored print of a dancer in a foolish gilt frame.

The blond girl came out of the back room as if at the sound from the door. She reviewed me, up and down, with an unmitigated deliberation.

"This is Mr. Grayl, Vicky."

"Y' little devil!" she spat at me. "I just wanted to get a good look at yer."

Drynd took a leaping step toward her. "Listen here!" he roared, angrily.

"Shut up, you!" she shouted back. "Y' poor simp, yer. Shut up! So this here's the one that's trying to loor y' away from your wife and child. My Gawd! I'd 'a' thought y' had more—"

He caught her by the arm. "Stop that! D'y' hear? This man—"

She shook him off. "Man nuthin'. He ain't a man

at all. I didn't see him good yesterday. But he's just what I thought. Just exactly." She looked at me squarely. "Y' poor—"

"Will yer listen to me?" demanded Drynd, standing now between us with his hands clenched.

"No, I won't listen t' yer. Not me. I'm tired listenin' t' yer, y' poor simp. I'm goin' t' have somethin' t' say to this little sneakin'—"

Drynd lifted a hand and swung it as if cutting off the talk.

"I've enlisted. D' y'get that? Enlisted. To-day. It's all done. I'm an enlisted man." He turned to me. "I'm awful sorry, Mr.—"

She gave a peculiarly piercing squeal. Anger prevented it, I fancy, from being a genuine shriek. She caught him, swinging him around, and glared at him in a red and yellow frenzy. "Enlisted? . . . You enlisted?"

Drynd nodded. "To-day. Best thing. Stops all the talk."

"You liar!—*liar!*"

Strangely, from the moment the girl had begun to attack me, and now, of course, the more definitely as she fixed her anger upon him, my distress centered in Drynd. It was pitiful to see his look turn from her eyes to mine, speechlessly. At the beginning I could feel his consciousness that I was there. She had surprised him, caught him unprepared to wrangle in the presence of another, and he fumbled desperately under the pain of the situation. An ugly twist came to his lips.

"Liar!" she screamed again, clutching at his shirt and thrusting out her hand with a movement that amounted to a blow.

Like mockery of her treble came the thin cry of a baby from the room beyond.

She thrust again at Drynd to place herself where she could level her flame at me.

"Yer hear that, do yer, Mr. Sawed Off? That's his

dear little baby boy that yer gettin' him away from, damn yer. You're a nice—"

Drynd caught her by the arm. "Say!" . . . he began.

But she swung loose. "Lemme alone! I'm glad yer goin'. I hope yer get killed the first thing. Good fer yer. Good *for* yer!"

"Will you let me say a word, Mrs. Drynd?" I ventured, at last.

"No!" she shouted. "Don't yer dare say a damn word or I'll—" She choked over this, glaring at me, quivering in her fury. "Yer said yer words to *him*, all right, didn't yer? A crazy man. Y' ought to be locked up."

I turned to the door. My heart was beating violently. Without guessing what Drynd might be able to do if I were not there, I knew that my quickest leave-taking was most to be desired. He strode quickly after me into the entry.

"I'm awful sorry—"

I made a sign that there should be no other thing said.

"I'll see you to-morrow," he whispered. . . .

## X

That odious scene quite staggered me—filled me with a sense of guilt and perplexity. The girl's insults, the picture of her vulgar fury, of her doll face working in its passion of resentment—the rage of the circumvented mate, clawing and screaming; Drynd's nasty predicament, the cry from the child, cutting in with its primordial protest—these sent me into the street with a be-draggled dismay. The echo of that squeal followed me. It accused—held me responsible for the mess. A culprit horror dogged me through streets I didn't know. Here was St. Mark's Church at last. . . . I was drifting down-town. Not to go home too soon—that seemed to be imperative. I must have walked several miles.

There was a weak moment in which I thought of going to find Zorn. But there could be no adjudication now. Drynd had ended that. He had enlisted. It was his way of dodging the onus of debate. When worst came to worst for him he would not have to call his resolution; it would have been sent upon its business.

I had made a bargain. The blond girl didn't matter. She was complicating, but she couldn't alter the bargain. I had planned making terms at Drynd's workplace and of proceeding with a certain order in leading up to the fulfilment. Now everything was twisted about—wretchedly twisted. And something awkward and all but ludicrous seemed to have thrust aside the beautiful thing I had dreamed.

With this feeling, the matter of going with Drynd to offer myself as his substitute became a miserable incident. It even began to look precarious. How could I be sure that there would not be a contemptuous refusal? If they denied me there would remain a money way of making good, but literally taking his place had seized my imagination, and to be frustrated in that visioned itself as a complete wreckage of an ideal.

As I look back I can see that my anxiety was quite of a piece with all that had happened in my thoughts. I did not wish merely to do the convenient thing, the thing that might so easily have served to salve the conscience, or hush ulterior criticism. I was removed from the privilege of advancing in the spotlight, of being called or tempted to the glory line of effort. There could be no swank, or spectacle, or hurrah, or flame-knit comradeship. The tests of the great game were for others. But there is another game, not less real, in which I wanted to play my part honorably. I knew that there could be a sort of swank in this game, too. Perhaps I was absurdly self-conscious about this point. Yet I kept on longing to meet the situation which should say to me, imperatively, "This is your opportunity!" I kept

on longing to have this opportunity *happen*—to have it stand clear and commanding when it did happen. I suppose we watch for Opportunity as a girl dreams of her appointed hero or a man visions the one right woman—as if rightness would loom with a nimbus, or at least be advertised by some unmistakable aura, peculiar and assuring. And then there stood Drynd, seeming, of a sudden, and with the simple conclusiveness of a miracle, to be the very sentry of chance challenging me for the password of my faith. . . .

Looking back upon the first day in the workshop, I can see that my trepidation belonged not merely to the emotion of that decision, but also to the confusion produced by the blond girl with spiral cheek-curls. Her yellow head was not to be dismissed from the picture, even after Drynd's assurance upon that following day that she had "let up on the dirty stuff." She remained as a menace. The memory of her angry face hovered threateningly. I never had faced a look of hatred, and such a memory could not be shaken free. For him, bound by the narrow terms of a single day's liberty, there was certain to be some kind of let-up, perhaps even a mushy contrition. Possibly she pawed him over and wept martyr tears. For me there must survive something quite different. Her thought of me would gather up all the ugly lines of her indignation. She would think of me not merely as a means of offense, but as an instigator. She would forget altogether that Drynd wanted to go and had hovered so long and so impatiently at the brink. She may even have concluded that I put the idea into his mind. I was the conspirator, the arch-devil of her difficulties.

Even after I sent that first week's money by Drynd's workshop friend, Lorkey, the boy with the rasping voice and the woolly black hair, I had no feeling of a relieved tension of hate. It was easy to imagine a sneering bitterness as added to all that had gone before. Lorkey

brought back on the Monday morning no comment except to say, simply, "I gave her that, all right." He may have expected me to ask questions. I let the point go by thanking him. He was the accepted intermediary. Drynd had the utmost confidence in him. I assumed that this confidence applied not only to his integrity, but to his entire serviceability in the matter of contact. The method and the person were both Drynd's suggestion. I felt that I wanted to follow his plan to the letter. If he had wished me to carry the money in person I think that in my state of mind at the moment I should have promised to do so. As it was, Lorkey smoothed the way. It was a primitive way, yet direct and conclusive . . . real money, by hand.

My induction into the clothing-factory of Sallison & Co. was rather quickly accomplished. Drynd's part had to be done quickly in view of his obligations to the United States of America. Normally the thing would have been a huge embarrassment to him. Under simpler conditions his awkwardness certainly would have been funnier than it was. But it was plain that an elated detachment from the whole problem of ordinary work, an end-of-the-job feeling of suspended responsibility, as well as a sense of a waiting adventure spreading its extraordinary panorama, were dulling the edge of his awkwardness.

Since I have become accustomed to old Sallison I can surmise something of his feeling when he came to the doorway of the easterly workroom on that first day and peered at me with rapt immobility. Sallison is a tallish, gray man, a little stooped, with a short, eccentric mustache, varying in color from sandy to white, and growing at all angles. His circular horn-rimmed glasses have the effect of belonging to the wide expression of his eyes. He seems always to wear smoke-colored clothes, and always to have a small red flower, usually a pink, in the lapel of his coat. He always takes off his coat

immediately on coming into the office, hanging it on a certain nail, behind his desk, beside a heavily framed, faded picture of a knight in armor.

Sallison was the first person I saw when I came into the place with Drynd. This was because he happened to be standing, with his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, looking out of a certain window.

But it was not Sallison who gave me the job. The negotiations resulting in this momentous matter were conducted with a younger man who took the suggestion rather blankly. Evidently he was annoyed by the loss of Drynd. Also it was evident that new help was scarce enough to favor an applicant. Drynd's eagerness to carry forward the plan gave him a breathlessly earnest air that might readily have betrayed a situation more urgent than a wish to favor a friend. I was a friend of his who wanted work at once. That was the way of it. I didn't know the clothing business. But I was smart. Drynd gave definite assurance of this.

Heiser also wears horn-rimmed glasses, which at first had the effect of relating him to Sallison. Yet I knew that he was not of the firm, because Drynd, in that hurried talk on the way to the place—there was too much else to leave room for many details of the work—had told me that Heiser was the manager, the man with whom we should have to put it over.

Heiser looked at me dubiously, as I thought. He is a stocky man of thirty-odd, with curly black hair, a fresh complexion, and even, white teeth. Suddenly he said: "All right. When can you go to work?"

"I'm ready," I said.

"You'll have to join the union. This is a union shop."

"I'm ready," I repeated, but I was a bit puzzled about this.

"We'll try you out," continued Heiser. "A few days. If you get on all right the delegate will talk

with you." He turned to Drynd. "So you're going to be a soldier."

Drynd grinned his relief. "Sure thing," he said.

"Well," remarked Heiser, "I thought you would."

"I have to report at twelve o'clock. I got twenty-four hours."

"So. Twenty-four hours. You enlisted yesterday. That's how it was."

Drynd nodded.

"Say—maybe—have you got some time, then? Twelve o'clock you say?"

"But I want to go home again," said Drynd.

"Of course. That's right. But twelve o'clock—could you show this man just what you've been doing? Half an hour. The button-machine—Berg will show him the machine." He turned to me. "You know there's a machine to learn, don't you?"

"I'll learn it," I said.

"Sure!" declared Drynd. "That ain't much to learn—not the button-machine. I'll show him everything I been doing."

"Tell him all you know," advised Heiser, with a violent wink. "That won't take you too long!"

And then at ten o'clock Drynd went away, after shaking hands with every one in the two workrooms and lastly with Heiser and Sallison. A lame man at one of the two-needle machines held his hand for a long time and said earnest things to him in a low voice, with lips close to his ear. One of the girls patted him on the cheek, giggling loudly. A wrinkled man in a black alpaca coat handed him the wages due him for three days' work—an incident that occasioned an exchange of glances between us, for Drynd had wondered, in our talk about money, whether this would happen without longer notice.

"Good-by!" he shouted from the door to the street stairway.



The lame man, who had bent over his machine, looked up and stared through the nearest window for several seconds.

## XI

When my aunt stopped laughing she made a rather reassuring remark.

"Do you know, Anson, in some ways this looks like the most sensible thing you ever did."

The inference as to some other ways in which it did not look so sensible she passed over, doubtless because these ways were obvious enough. Not to accentuate the complications I avoided emphasis as to the matter of Drynd's wife. That matter seemed to be fortuitous. Properly Vicky didn't belong to the issue, though she occupied so prominent a place in my feelings. I mean that her particular violence was not to be considered as belonging to the group of things either Drynd or I had reason to consider at the beginning. Since he already had enlisted when her violence came on, there had been no way of making a consideration of that.

My aunt's point was that the shop would teach me something I needed to know. She didn't urge that I was a dreamer or theorist who needed to put his hands into reality. Perhaps she let this go as not needing to be said, and as applying to all of us. She was thinking, I am sure—for the sympathetic twinkle lurked in the shade of her look—that my personal crisis had its rights, its need of a fling if not of a fight, and going into the workshop partook somewhat of the character of both.

Despite her laugh, I am sure that Aunt Paul gathered that I was taking the thing very seriously. In fact, the laugh may have had something to do with a conviction of this sort. I suppose it has its funny side. If it had not, possibly I couldn't have laughed with her.

Yet on that first day, in the evening of which I made my confession to her, I had a lump in my throat; par-

ticularly in the period immediately following Drynd's "Good-by!" at the door, when I realized that I must go it alone; when the drone of the machines rose in one of those obscuring hazes of sound that appal the groping mind. I had no repugnance to manual labor. On the contrary, I found myself longing for the contact. But I was constrained by a sense of incompetence, a sense of an immense mystery of detail, and of a terrifying hurry. The sounds hurried. I remember my first impression of one man—his name is Troke, Axel Troke, a man with a fierce, closely cropped head—who was stitching certain parts of marine coats, stitching violently, on one coat after another, lifting from one heap and throwing with his right hand toward a second heap that would in turn come to a workman farther along. The dexterous, second-clipping way in which Troke grasped a coat, swung it to bring the seams he was to stitch under the blur of his machine needle, the rhythmic swing of his shoulders, the seeming frenzy of his attack upon the problem of sheer multiplication, filled me with dismay. I felt for that instant of apprehending Troke that presently I should be gathered into a frightful maw and obliged to scuttle down the throat of the monster to avoid being crunched by the teeth. I learned afterward, of course, that these journeymen were piece-workers, and that Troke, for example, was one of three men, each of whom did two men's work on one machine and was paid proportionately. I was, indeed, incited to some reverence for Troke when I discovered that he earned close to sixty-five dollars—sometimes beyond that—in a week.

I was not to be a piece-worker. Drynd, who had emerged from a boy's job at fifteen dollars to button-machine work and other tasks not implying journey-manship, had been receiving eighteen dollars in his pay-envelope. Heiser gave me to understand that I would receive fifteen dollars for my first week.

It was plain that the urgency of the work led him to hope that I would be able to do labor commanding more money as soon as possible. I could see a certain curiosity shining through all that he said to me, though he never wasted a syllable during that interval in which he was reasonably impatient to be sure that in losing one man he had not failed to find another.

The first day was a day of furtive looks. Even the cyclonic Axel Troke, without missing a beat in his startling rhythm, could fling a flashing interrogation from under his savage brows. The lame man at the two-needle machine sent me looks that seemed to be reminiscent of that parting with Drynd. I was coincident and of some obscure interest on that account.

A red-haired man with an extraordinary Adam's apple, who always has cotton in one of his ears, and who has a way of stretching his mouth, as in an absurd sort of grin, when he reaches a certain point in turning a line of stitching, looked at me on several occasions as if I were quite incredible. His name is Browsel. He surprised me on the second day by asking me, without preface or explanation, if I played pinochle. There were signs of his being disconcerted by the discovery that I did not play pinochle. I have since learned from him that he once knew a man who was—that is—who had (he was trying to imply "hunchback" without saying so)—and this man was an absolutely astounding pinochle player. There never was in the world a man who could play pinochle like him. His genius was so utterly unprecedented, seemingly, that Browsel had developed a theory—in fact, some one had given him specific support for the theory—that men who were like that just had to be wonderful at pinochle. I suggested that during some noon hour he might teach me the game. The suggestion was received thoughtfully. When it had germinated I could see that Browsel was considering the interesting possibilities of such an experiment, was

estimating the chance that his theory might be confirmed under his own eyes and by his own connivance.

The girl who had patted Drynd on the cheek, Dolores Oronato, with the inky Italian eyes and the heap of shiny hair, had at first a pitying look. In fact, this expression lasted for several days. When she had spoken to me—it was only to say, "The foreman wants you"—the look began to change and at last became very friendly. In a week she was calling me "Grayly."

It was different with Rosa Crooch, a flabby girl with faded brown hair and a birthmark on her left temple, who works with rounded shoulders but with her face lifted, as if mentally detached from the thing she is doing. Rosa Crooch ignored me and continued to do so. The wiry young woman at the next table, Sina Rogovitsch of the sharp tongue, told me the other day that Rosa regarded me as bad luck. She mentioned this as substantiating her contention that Rosa was a fool.

Drynd's friend Lorkey betrayed a proprietary interest in me. He went about the business of exhibiting the topography of the job with the look of a person who knows a secret. He indicated where I might hang my hat and coat, and suggested, wisely, in view of the heat, that I would wish to get rid of my collar.

On that day there appeared to be particular activity in bundling. Twenty-five coats were roped in each bundle. Lorkey had vague notions of the central contracting place, in New York somewhere, to which these bundles would be going.

"The manager's all right," remarked Lorkey, in the midst of our work with the bundles. "The foreman ain't so easy."

"Who is the foreman?"

Lorkey indicated a man standing beside a cutting-table at the far end of the larger workroom; a round, florid man in a striped shirt and wrinkled linen trousers.

"He was down-stairs when you came. I heard Heiser telling him about you. He's sizing you up, all right."

Soon after this the foreman came down the room with an odd waddling movement. Bruler disappointed me. I expected him to be gruff and peremptory. I had my own ideas of a foreman. Instead he has a high, thin voice, a peculiar inflection, and a fretted, indirect manner, accentuated by a way of turning his profile when he makes a remark or issues an order. His profile is comic, especially when he is chewing gum.

Lorkey seemed to feel obligated, or at least strongly disposed, to be informative. He may have figured that I would be at a loss without some knowledge of my human surroundings. There were, indeed, not many opportunities for talk, excepting noontime, but this added a certain piquancy to fragments of Lorkeyan philosophy. These fragments gained a distinctive flavor from Lorkey's voice, which always has a rusty or damaged quality, like the exaggeration of a bad cold, and he is capable of curious transitions.

For example, he had just spoken of a picnic-park in the Bronx—we were side by side, sorting coats from the pressers' benches—when it occurred to him to remark:

"The Jews make the most money. They work like hell."

Upon this statement of cause and effect he did not seem to expect me to make comment.

I indicated Axel Troke. "Is he a Jew?"

"Nope. I don't know what he is. A Swede or a Burglarian or something. But Meinzer's a Jew. He beats Troke. They say he owns three houses."

Lorkey's glance fell for a moment upon the group of girl workers.

"I don't like Jew girls," he said. "They got the best legs. But I don't like 'em."

There could be no doubt that Lorkey was tremendously

selective, full of cheerful prejudices and sharply qualified appreciations.

"Why don't you like Jew girls?" I asked him.

"Oh, I don't know. They're too sassy. They paint too much. Did y'ever know a Russian girl? They're all right."

I never had known a Russian girl.

"Sina's Russian. She's too damn smart. But I know fine Russian girls. There's one works in an ice-cream parlor on Second Avenue. An Irish girl's nice sometimes. I know 'n Irish girl. Her father's a cop. She's a peach. German girls—ex-cuse me. Exceptin' one I used t' know 'n Hobucken. She was the best dancer 'n Hobucken. Honest. The German's is goin' t' git licked, all right. Don't you think so?"

Yes, I thought so.

"But, say"—Lorkey's head drew very close—"don't talk nothin' about the war to Bruler."

The deep significance of Lorkey's tone made comment or inquiry quite unnecessary.

I was thoroughly tired at the end of that first day, and not wholly cleared of bewilderment. It was surprising to see how differently most of the men looked when they were dressed for leaving. Browsel, for example, though he had seemed hopelessly unkempt (I wondered if his name made me think of "blowzy"), not merely by reason of his open shirt with its half-sleeves that had the effect of threatening nakedness, but by a purely individual state of disorder into which he falls soon after reaching his machine, emerged upon the street in a Palm Beach suit, with a tall collar that rasped his Adam's apple, a speckled scarlet tie, a gorgeously rib-boned Panama hat, scrupulously polished pumps and a cane of superior distinction. His intensity had now disappeared. After lighting a tenuous cigar he sauntered richly.

The women and girls effected an even more startling

transformation, which was particularly marked in the case of Sina Rogovitsch. Though Lorkey's invidious comments as to artificial coloration had seemed especially to convict the Jewish girls, it appeared to me that Sina was most profusely ornamented in the matter of powder, rouge, and lip vermilion when she stepped forth on very high white heels, swinging a beaded handbag, editing her coiffure with a subtle finger, and betraying entire satisfaction in her teeth by her way of smiling with fat Mrs. Jaskol, of the basting-tables, the invariable companion of her homeward walks.

It was on the afternoon of the second day that Bruler said: "Berg will show you the button-machine. Look out for your fingers. Take it slow."

A long speech for Bruler.

Berg is a melancholy-looking man, long in face and in body. His eyes prepared me to hear that he once had been some one in particular. He is quite silent, like a beaten dreamer. He was silently excited in giving me that first lesson at the button-machine. I fancied that he was in doubt of my adjustment. There are two treadles under the machine. One lifts the little steel fingers that take hold of the button (with its eagle and stars), the other starts the needle in its series of uncanny leaps. It was an immense relief to Berg to see that my feet found these treadles.

"You see," I said, "it's my *back* that's short."

He winced without a word, and laid the shoulder of a marine coat so that the strap might be in place to receive the button.

"You press it down here," he said. "Over this edge. That's where the button will go. . . . So. . . . Now take up your foot—no, your left foot . . . so. Now push down your right foot."

The needle whirled. "*So!*"

The button was in place. I was thrilled. I had beheld the ultimate magic. The bit of bronze relief

against the gray-green of the shoulder-strap shone for the moment like a supreme triumph of art. There were many boxes of buttons. These and a heap of coats Berg instructed me in placing as preliminary to my slow experiments, though he advocated a number of trials with waste pieces of cloth. Berg also went over the anatomy of the machine, told me where the oil must be supplied, where the trouble usually occurred as to the thread, about the belt from the motor, and other vulnerable points. "There is always something," he added, despairingly.

He mopped his long face. It was very warm in this smaller workroom. The winter wool seemed to make the heat more ironical.

I had several mishaps in my first hour, the most humiliating being a sadly misplaced button. The calamity looked to be irretrievable. But Berg, who sat at the adjoining machine, explained the proper method of removing the button. I was vastly relieved. On the next movement of the starting-treadle I was more careful in holding my coat steadily.

When the day closed I ached in every joint. Yet I was quite happy.

"You can do it," said Berg, briefly.

By the end of the third day I had learned not to hold myself so tensely and was much less weary. It was good to feel the energy for the walk home. I was a real workman.

On the fourth day Rooks, the union delegate (who works "in the cutting"), told me that I had better be getting my card. I was not a failure.

## XII

Stitching buttons leaves plenty of opportunity for thought. There are poignant rebukes to absent-mindedness, yet the margin of mental liberty is wide. I suppose that even the tempestuous Axel Troke thinks vari-



ously and comfortably. Having co-ordinated his own mechanism, a man may make astral excursions.

I used to wonder what Berg was thinking. Of something pathetic, I was sure. When he looked across the room or out of a window he did not seem to be scrutinizing anything in particular. He was looking a long way . . . into the past, it may be; or toward some place or person far removed from this hot cell or the cavern with its fire-escapes.

I was sure that much thinking swirled in the head of Rosa Crooch. With her face up so much of the time while her fingers flew in the basting, Rosa seemed not only thoughtful, but fiercely intent, as if she were working out a problem of immense intricacy.

Doubtless they all were *wishing*. . . . These would be acutely personal wishes, in all likelihood, not abstract desires. Simple things, one might guess, steps rather than flights of ascent to Something. One could not fancy the probable step unless he knew the starting-point. I reminded myself that they all had the same address. . . . Somewhere in the World . . . that each looked out upon the universe from the cell of Self, wishing in long or short range, here as elsewhere, by the accident of impinging needs. The spectacle of a group of types so strongly in contrast to those I had commonly met filled me with a fresh awe of the mystery of desire, a new sense of the tangled filaments connecting individuals with the mass; a new sense, too, as trite, I have no doubt, as reformers, of the frightful futility of trying to mend the world without the fundamental vision of All of Us.

That word "Us" sent me far. "Us" meant a new thing to me. I have no doubt that the soldiers who will wear these coats upon which I have been fastening the wing-spread eagles will begin thinking in terms of "us"—an "us" new to them—and asking the world some exceedingly awkward questions. These ques-

tions will be as awkward as if they had not been asked over and over again since man began to talk. Unfortunately, their awkwardness has never been insurmountable. History is largely a record of expedients for fooling the askers of questions.

On a Monday morning toward the end of September Lorkey came to me with a piece of startling information. He seemed to communicate it literally.

"She said, 'It's a wonder Grayl wouldn't come over sometime.'"

Drynd rather than Vicky had been in my thoughts. Letters had come from the Southern camp with enthusiastic accounts of his work. He wished that the camp were nearer New York. It was a long trip for a man that could get only two or maybe three days. Everybody said they'd be going over soon. Surely that would bring him to New York. But you couldn't tell. Sometimes they didn't sail from New York. They had to work pretty hard, but he was feeling fine.

The truth is that I never sat down to the machine without thinking of Drynd. It had been his machine. I was literally taking his place, doing the things he would have been doing, and a picture rose up—it had a kind of quiver in the hot days—of the boy in dusty khaki with the crossed guns on his collar, and that eager laugh. More than once it occurred to me that I was helping to make a winter coat that might be his. When this happened I lingered over the choice of buttons, selecting those which I liked to fancy were particularly happy in their mintage. It occurred to me, also, that I might some day be put to a peculiar test; that he might, in the fortunes of the game, come to a crisis in which he would do a very fine thing, something outstanding that would be remarked. . . . "Corporal Owen Drynd, a young artilleryman from New York, performed a feat of unique daring" . . . and that, by the habit of following

him as if he were myself, I should find myself pushing into the glorified figure. . . .

A thousand fantastic speculations came into my head, sometimes out of my gratified hours, sometimes out of a gloom that would throw its pall over me with strangely stupefying results. I have often in these weeks felt heavy of foot and dull of brain. But I never saw Drynd save as the shining image.

Vicky Drynd's remark fell unpleasantly. I passed off Lorkey's message. Lorkey's manner of delivering it gave no sign that he felt himself to be intrusted with a specific suggestion, or that he knew the details of that scene in the alley.

"She said she was pretty mean to yer," he added to the first statement. "But she says she was just mad then. She isn't now."

No such assurance could be any lure. I was through with the Vicky person.

Nevertheless, when Lorkey returned to the subject last Monday morning I felt obliged to look at it squarely.

"She wants t' know if yer won't come over. She wants t' ask yer something."

I suppose I will go, because I am afraid of her. Being through with disagreeable things isn't always by choice. My complacent assumption that I was through with her begins to look unbelievably silly. And it begins to look outrageous and humiliating that I should be tugged at like a puppy on a string. Yet I know that I must go. It is the very recollection of her nasty tongue and contorted face that makes me know it. It appears that she suggested to-morrow night.

### XIII

I made out an admirable program of procedure for the visit. The formula did not fit, mostly, I suppose, because she disconcerted me at the beginning by her ap-

pearance. Quite unaccountably she did not look common. She is pretty in rather a striking way. Even in the flaring light of that room I couldn't deny that she was exceptionally attractive in every physical sign. Her hair has a lively luster that I haven't often seen in hair that is called golden, with spirited lines in its way of flowing. Her complexion is beautifully clear. There was an incredible pulsing softness in the look of her skin that perplexed me when I tried to think backward to that noisy night before Drynd went away. Everything that I had thought about the expression of her eyes seemed to have been wrong. I had been in no doubt that they were handsome eyes, but, angry and sneering, they did not hint the richly fringed effect of gentleness I saw in them as she stood there holding open the door.

She wore a white frock, the waist of which had folded lines showing a deep flash of her body. I suppose there is a point at which such revelations become undebatably immodest. But the equation always brings in the staggering complexity of the fashion. Modesty makes terms with the mode as well as with elemental inches. As an effect the frock seemed to belong to her.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Grayl."

Her voice had changed with everything else. It had dropped or overlaid the common tone. I soon discovered that she retained the Vicky vernacular, yet the storm must have accounted for much of the vulgarity of effect.

"Sit down, won't yer? I thought yer wouldn't want to come."

"I wasn't quite welcome the last time," I said.

"Gee! I was crazy then. Yes, I was. Just crazy. I was pretty mean, wasn't I?"

"You spoke pretty plainly," I said.

"Lemme have yer hat."

She seated herself at the end of the red sofa nearest my chair.

"I take it all back. You're a gentleman. I'll say that. I was so excited. I knew well enough *you* didn't make him go. But I was mad. He was always talkin' about enlistin'. It was awful for a feller t' do a thing like that. There's plenty of single men. That's what I kept sayin' to 'im. 'Let the single men go,' I said. 'You have a wife and baby.' And then he'd pull some wheeze about goin' away to protect his wife and baby. He heard somebody say that. And now he's in it. He says it's all right. But he'll be sore before he gets through. He ain't no feller for rough-house, anyway. He ain't so strong. His family ain't strong."

"He says he's feeling fine," I suggested.

"Of course. He's excited. I suppose they have good times. They say they have shows and everything in the camp. They soon forget about their wives, I suppose. What did *he* think about his wife? Say, I don't see how yer could do what yer did. I don't get it yet. Where do you come in? I didn't believe you'd send the wages. That's a fact. I didn't believe it. I thought there was something phoney in it . . . that maybe you'd get fresh. Yer ain't that kind, are yer? Y' know a friend of mine said maybe you was a spy. Ain't that the limit? 'A spy?' I says. 'What d'yer mean spy? What would he be spyin' on? I ain't *seen* 'im.' 'Oh, *you* wouldn't see 'im if he *was* spyin',' she said. Can you beat that? 'No,' I said, 'I think he's rich or something. If he ain't rich how c'n he work for nothin'? It ain't sensible.' Yer know what I mean."

"I suppose it does look funny," I said. A snapshot of me at that moment would, I am sure, have revealed a particularly vacuous smile. I was absurdly uncomfortable.

"M' friend said, 'Well,' she says, 'there's a game in it somewheres.' 'You're a fool,' I says. 'He's a *patriot*.' Ain't that it?"

Surely the word never had a queerer setting. I won-

dered what the friend thought of it. Vicky didn't wait for an expression of my feeling.

"You're all right. You been straight."

She put a hand over mine where it rested on the arm of the chair.

"I didn't know you was so nice or I'd never said what I did."

The tingling warmth from her hand and a glow of friendliness in her eyes made my position quite abject.

"Let us not think any more of what happened," I stammered.

She put a final pressure in the touch of her hand.

"I knew you'd be all right," said Vicky. "I knew if I was in trouble *you* wouldn't forget me."

"Are you in trouble?" I asked.

"Not exactly in trouble," she went on. "Yer wouldn't call it trouble. But I got t' move. It ain't a decent place. Up an alley. There's a nice little flat I c'n get—two awful nice rooms—for eighteen dollars. But I got a little behind and I thought maybe . . . Yer see I got *terrible* behind without a decent thing to wear . . . an' the baby needed some things . . . an' I thought maybe—I'm not sayin' yer really *are* rich, but I thought maybe you would let me have a week ahead so's I can move." She hurried on. "Yer know it's awful hard to get any movin' done. What d'yer think them flat-slingers want to take this little bunch of stuff over to Second Avenue?—eight dollars. C'n yer beat that?"

When I told her I should be very glad to advance the week's money, and to keep the payments advanced (this seemed to be implied), she caught my hand ardently.

"You're a good sport! That 'll just help me out fine. Say, d'you know your face makes me think of Trace Torrence in the movies. Honest. Just like his brother. Do you know him? He's some lover, all right."

I was sorry not to know about Torrence.

"Will yer have a glass of beer—I got a bottle in the ice-box."

"Thank you . . ." I began.

"Maybe you'd rather have a highball. Is that it? I got . . ."

"Not to-night, thank you."

"Oh, you ain't a bit sociable! But that's only your little old way, ain't it? Listen, I understand you better all the time. Ain't that funny? My friend says I c'n just *read* people. I guess that's so. What do they call that when yer c'n *read* people? Anyway, she said it."

I managed to get on my feet. "I fancy most women are good at that," I said.

"Mr. Smarty! I bet *you* ain't so quiet when yer get started!"

I promised to send the money over by Lorkey. Unfortunately for my reputation as a rich man, I had but five dollars in my pocket.

It occurred to me that it would be just as well not to describe this incident to my aunt; at least not in detail. She certainly would feel obliged to warn me against Vicky Drynd, and this was quite unnecessary. Yet I compromised by telling her that Vicky had asked me to call and that she had apologized for her earlier behavior.

"There is something romantic about it," said my aunt, with an emphasized casualness, I thought, yet without traceable cynicism.

She had the evening paper in her hand.

"And, speaking of romance, we have one on the block. Listen to this. 'Blind Heiress Weds Guardian' . . ."

I heard her voice, though I rather missed the details. Felicia had had a quiet wedding, but not too quiet for print, since the distinction of some of the few guests, notably of her guardian's brother, who is a Senator, and of her late father's cousin, who is an ex-Ambassador,

was quite to be remarked. Her name was Abigail Hidge. It is now Mrs. Simeon Trogett.

Nevertheless, Abigail, you smiled at me. You thought your smile was for the sunlight in the Square, but I intercepted it. It was my smile. I took it, and I shall keep it. And that was my look, though it did not see—your eyes and my sight. That picture of you—of your eyes that sent out so much of you, though they brought nothing back; of those wonderful, sensitive lips that have no infirmity, that may speak and be kissed and express that ultimate beauty of color never to be belittled by all the smeared counterfeits of a stupid world—that picture belongs to me. Even old Simeon can't take that away.

I hope you will be happy, Abigail. You have the capacity for happiness. You have proved that, for you could smile into the dark. Simeon may be a good sort. At all events, his looks will never trouble you. I hope he will know enough just to *let* you be happy, to let you find in your own way the piercingly white end of your dream vista; that if some great desire which does not, which would not, I am sure, fret you, but only fills you with its ineffable light—a light which you can *feel*, and which you, in the dark, can know as an emanating glory—calls and calls to you, that you may find in that desire a question carrying its own joy, a question which, like that of the eager flower, reaching into the encompassing blue, answers itself.



## PART SEVEN

### *Victory*

#### I

DAY after day I have the window, and the sullen gap among the buildings, and the smell of the clothes and of the machines. Day after day I have the hurrying whir of the needles, a thick, enveloping murmur splashed by the chatter of my own steel seamstress as she nervously answers the prod of my feet. Day after day I see the same figures in the same attitudes, making the same gestures as they swish the cloth or shake out the kinks in their own bodies.

(There is a man named Mortensen who several times each day tosses his hairy arms aloft with fists clenched in a fiercely tense stretching motion. His face stretches in harmony with the paroxysmal crisis. I am quite aware that his purpose is peaceful, and that the effect to him is entirely agreeable, perhaps even delicious. Yet I cannot see him do this thing without ascribing to the savage gesture a sort of allegorical significance. It is as if he were saying: "I am mute and patient, but by the living God! some day, in some ripe hour, you who inflict upon me these horrors of slavish labor shall see a stroke of prodigious vengeance!" Yet Mortensen is an extraordinarily gentle soul. He has told me, with gravity and tenderness, of his goldfish at home. He insists that nobody understands goldfish.)

Beautiful things have been written about the human imagination, about its faculty for projection, its dazzling ingenuity in occupying objective situations. Doubtless it has much of the agility that has been pictured. Sym-

pathy itself may go a long way with the lantern of imagination. But I am freshly assured that only actual experience can give a true sense of such a matter a sustained manual labor. I thought I had the sympathy. Perhaps I had. I am not sure that in sheer sympathy I have so greatly changed. The vital point is that one has to stand on a spot to know how the world looks from that spot. And in this matter of day after day labor one has to accomplish contact to understand. The Concord philosopher said, speaking of solitude and society, "Keep your head in one, your hands in the other." The head may acquire sympathy. Only the hands can complete the current of understanding.

The outlook—that is the impressive matter; the way a changed *physical* outlook shifts the perspective beyond any degree figured by theory. The fact that I can write this as if it never had been written before or experienced before illustrates precisely the great fact against which I have been jostled in the rush. If experience really could be transmitted, if men could understand without contact, I suppose there would be no very serious labor troubles; at least not those which grow out of a lack of understanding. There would remain those that would grow out of the debate as to who must labor and what portion they should receive. This remainder ought to be sufficient.

I do not deceive myself as to one point: Labor is scarce and growing scarcer. Even a very human sort of shop like this would be different in ordinary times. In ordinary times perhaps Bruler would be not merely peevish. With the normal pressure for work I should not be getting eighteen dollars a week. As some of the cocky economists would tell me, any man's offer to work for less would cut the price down; unless Sallison were benevolent—or unless the mass's will provided against this result of pressure. The union is but a primitive effort, mighty as it sometimes is, to barricade the worker.

It was old Jakow who said the other day—sitting like a gnome on the street steps at noontime—"The world's going a lot farther than the union before it gets through."

"Sure," said Mortensen, with a hairy gesture. "Soviets."

"I don't know about Soviets. But the world's going a lot farther. It ain't going to be as it is. Somethin's got to be done."

"The producers is goin' to have their turn," said Mortensen.

Jakow astonished me by his challenge to this. "What d'yer mean by 'producers'? That's a foolish word, generally. 'Producers.' There's different kinds of producin'."

"I don't see it's foolish," persisted Mortensen.

"What's foolish about it?" demanded Axel Troke, taking his pipe from between his brown teeth.

"It don't do no good," declared Jakow, "to make out that men do all the producin' with their hands. That ain't goin' to mend nothin'. Not as I see."

"Are the damned capitalists producers?" snapped Axel Troke.

"Maybe some of them ain't," admitted Jakow. "Exceptin' maybe producin' a chance to git work."

"Hell!" growled Axel Troke. "A chance to bleed the men that do the producin'. Exploiters. You talk like a fool."

Jakow shook his head. "We ain't goin' to git things changed that way. Say"—he swung about toward Axel Troke, and an extraordinary animation came into his face—"did Karl Marx stop *producin'* when he began writin'? Did that man Lincoln stop *workin'* when he stopped splittin' rails? Didn't Christ *produce* nothin' after he stopped bein' a carpenter?"

It was as if Jakow had made a long speech.

Axel Troke laughed hoarsely. "Jakow, you ought to git on a soap-box."

"An' what's all that got to do with the workers' revolution?" queried Mortensen, in his mild voice. "I don't see it at all. . . ."

I have heard fragments of various vehement discussions. Many of them amazed me. Only once have I been drawn in, and then without satisfaction. There had been talk about British and American labor and the more prophetic stand of the British. This brought up again the question of unions and their effectiveness.

"Unions, they've done their work," said Jakow. "We got to do better."

"How better?" demanded Axel Troke. "They ain't gone half far enough. Why, the capitalists 's got them all by the nose."

An Italian named Vivirato, with heavy, nervous eyebrows, tilted his cigarette and slapped his biceps with his palms. "The unions ain't got no fight in 'em any more. War money is puttin' 'em t' sleep."

"What d' *you* think?" asked Jakow, turning to me.

"I'm very ignorant about it," I said. "Of course, I believe in unions. I'm mighty glad to have a card. My only notion has been that the best thing, maybe, would be a union of all of us—of all the people."

"But what does that mean?" burst out Axel Troke.

"Soviets," said Mortensen.

"Just words," said Vivirato.

"I know what he means," interposed Jakow.

Axel Troke suspended his pipe again. "For God's sake, tell us."

"He means—"

"Perhaps I can explain it myself," I said. "I mean that the different unions, all struggling to get fair play for the worker, really are not able to go so far, to get as good a kind of fair play for themselves, as might be got out of a union of all the people. For instance, before there was a union Vivirato would be pushing the cutting-machine through a hundred and twenty-five

layers of suit cloth. Now the union rule holds him to thirty-five. But there are thousands of other things that mean a lot to working-people, people not in unions—”

“But they all ought to be in unions,” Mortensen contended.

“I think that somehow they should all be brought into one big union of all the people.”

“You mean Socialism,” observed Browsel, who had just joined the noontime group.

“The Syndicalists they got a better idea,” said Vivirato.

“They all got too many ideas,” asserted Jakow. “That’s why they don’t get nowhere.”

“We don’t want ‘all the people’ to have the say,” Vivirato persisted. “We want the people that does the work to have the say. D’yer get that, son? The people that does the work.”

“What work?” asked Jakow, dryly.

There could be no end to such discussions. Sometimes they had a comical violence, particularly when the debate raged round about some triviality that was quite obliterated in the scuffle. At other times the talk took an impressive emotional turn in which the lurking skepticism lost its zest. I often found myself quelled by evidences of peculiarly intense thinking on vital lines, on all matters close to the bones of life, and by an unmitigated way of bringing the thoughts out.

For example, the wide-shouldered Russian, Novikoff, speaking from a pause in a jerky squabble over the word “democracy,” remarked in a big voice, “In my country we got a writing man, Chekhof—you don’t know about him—”

“What d’yer mean, ‘my country’?” Browsel demanded. “Ain’t this your country? You been here twelve years?”

“Well,” returned Novikoff, “a man has a mother, and he has a wife, too.”

"Ha!" Browsel exploded, understandingly, "you married the United States! Novikoff, you got funny ideas."

"This man Chekhof," continued Novikoff, "he was a doctor, they say. I don't know. He is dead now. But he wrote stories. Not trash stories, you understand. I read one o' them stories. I don't know how you would say the name of the story in American. But it was about a man, a *magister*, who saw a black ghost—"

Vivirato giggled. "How could it be a black ghost?"

"The ghost was black," insisted Novikoff. "This man, the *magister*, who saw the black ghost, was maybe a little crazy. I don't know. But he saw the ghost and talked to him. It was very sad. And I asked my priest about it. And he said to me (he was a fine old man), 'Fidor, that story means that you should believe in yourself.' If I could tell you the story you would understand what he meant. That's what he said. 'You should believe in yourself. And the Church should believe in itself. And the workers should believe in themselves.' I remembered that part. 'The workers should believe in themselves.'"

"What did th' old man mean?" asked Axel Troke. "I never could git hold o' preachers."

"He wasn't preachin'," declared Novikoff. "He just said it to me."

"I can't see it means anything," insisted Axel Troke.

"Anyhow," Novikoff went on, "I think it means that we ought to know what we're believin'. And do we? They yell about 'democracy.' What's it mean? Tell me that. They say France's democracy, and America's democracy, and England's democracy. How do they make that? Ain't they all different?"

"They're all alike," said Axel Troke. "All capitalist."

"Well, then, is democracy capitalist?"

Jakow aroused himself. "Surely not. What I say is, it don't have to be. It ain't the names, it's the peo-

ple. Socialism, Soviets, Syndic—what do you call 'em—they don't make no difference. It's the people. They got t' think."

"A hell of a lot of good thinkin' does," muttered Axel Troke, contemptuously. "Thinkin'! They got t' get busy. The people got to get their rights."

It was here that Novikoff delivered himself of a strange tirade which I should find it hard to write, though I shall never forget the burning look of him as he brought down his clenched hands. "Wrong!" he shouted. "Thinkin'—that's just what they got to do." He had a hot scorn for the sheep people that were running this way and that at the heels of every noise—quieted now because there was a war and bigger pay and a club over them, but grumbling and grumbling and waiting to run somewhere after another noise; but not thinking enough. Thinking what to do. Thinking about what "rights" are. Russia was thinking as well as starving. Russia *had* to think. It was time. America, it would have to think. It would have to think about this democracy thing it said it believed in; whether it really meant anything at all; whether people who believed in themselves could believe in democracy, too. The people who came back from the war, in France, in England, in Italy, in America, they would want to know about this democracy and what it was going to do now. *Do*, you understand, not talk about.

Axel Troke was ready with a caustic rejoinder, but it was a quarter to one and we went back to work.

## II

Sarah, though greatly absorbed by her own adventures, has always been eager to hear about the workshop. She has seemed to think that it was best to be jocular, to pretend to wonder when I was going to be promoted, and so on.

"You know, Anson, you really have a soul above buttons."

"I'd like to see you try to put one on," I said.

"The idea!" cried Sarah. "Think of a motor-car expert—"

"Well," I said, "if anything in the world is perfectly plain, by proof that is furnished a thousand times a day, it is that a very low order of intelligence does not preclude a capacity for running a car. Moreover, I have been doing pockets. To parallel that you would have to run two cars at once."

"I'm not a bit sorry for you," said Sarah. "I know you're making notes for a great essay on 'Pockets and Patriotism'."

"Good idea," remarked my aunt. "They're pretty well tied just now. So far as the income tax is concerned, I suppose you'll escape. But how *would* you measure your wages? *Can* you be said to get any? It's a funny situation for a conscientious man—or would be if there was money enough to carry you to the figures."

"It may be original," remarked Sarah, gravely, "but not illogical. It shouldn't be called funny. A man earns wages. A wife gets the money. The fact that it isn't *his* wife is a mere detail."

"Right for you, Sarah," I said. "You state it like an officer and a gentleman."

"Though I should say," interjected my aunt, "that the tendency to regard *whose* wife as a mere detail has been known to be perilous."

"Now, Aunt Paul!" protested Sarah. "*Please* don't make me more nervous. Don't you suppose I'm remembering every day—right in a traffic jam—how absent-minded Anson is? And—"

"It isn't every man," I said, "who can support one woman and amuse two others, and sustain the effect."

"There's one woman you've forgotten," Sarah added, seriously. "Mother worries about you."



"Nonsense!"

"But she does. I'm sure she thinks it would be better to take up a collection for the Drynd girl."

"If she only knew," I said, "she has much greater occasion to worry over you—darting about with handsome military chiefs, night and day, responsible to no exacting domestic guardian, privileged to invent explanations for the most shameless hours, presenting all the time an appearance that constitutes an insidious temptation to our precious youth—"

"Do you know," said Sarah, "I was within a street or two of your shop yesterday with a colonel who was being measured for new clothes—and I can tell you it takes a lot of clothes to get around him. He's enormous. And I was thinking, suppose I dropped you at the shop some morning, or picked you up at five-thirty, would it upset discipline?"

"We work-people," I said, "refuse to be patronized. That is precisely what you cannot do. We'll have cars of our own when we're quite ready. No, it wouldn't upset discipline; though it might upset their gravity, if they happened to have any of that at the moment."

"Good heavens!" cried Sarah. "I wonder if this means that you haven't told any of your work friends about me. I should think—"

"We don't discuss our women," I said.

Laura's attitude has been disconcerting. When I saw her for the first time after she had heard the news from Sarah I fancied that she was annoyed. She looked into my eyes with an intentness that seemed to mean a sort of anger. I attributed this to the irritation of a person who was rebelliously unsympathetic toward the cataclysm of war. I remember saying to myself: "This is a Pine effect. The future Mrs. Lawrence Pine is incensed by a quixotish escapade."

The fact that she said no such thing did not remove my suspicion.

Afterward she wanted to know about the work-people, women and men. She knows all about unions. It was the foreign born that appeared to interest her particularly. She caught up Novikoff. I can see that anything skeptical or revolutionary or foreign has a kind of exotic flavor for her. Her questions made me feel as if I were a poor observer.

"You must know," I said, "that I'm not a labor investigator or anything like that. I'm not slumming. I just have a plain job for a plain purpose. These people are not freaks. They're not submerged, except to high-brow reformers. Just now they're working specifically for the United States. They're covering the nakedness of an army."

"You're horribly quick on the trigger," returned Laura. "You shouldn't let the game make you so irritable. I wonder if you're tired."

"Not at all," I told her. "I never felt better in my life. I have honest work. I'm not sure that I ever had it before. When I think of the drivel I used to teach it gives me a nausea."

At this Laura visibly brightened.

"You must admit that has the reformer sound."

"I don't care what sound it has. It's true. The whole mess is due to bad schools, or not enough schools, as in Russia. Sometimes I think that affirmatively bad schools do more harm than no schools at all."

"We sha'n't quarrel about that," said Laura. It was as if she expected me to resent her agreeing with me. I stopped exploding. It is a pity one should dissipate energy in explosions. Moreover, it was exasperating to find that I had said something that would have pleased Pine; though this was less annoying than the suspicion that Laura was getting ready to pity me.

At that moment nothing would have seemed more

calamitous, for she has trimmed sail since those earlier days when she was Laura Sherrick, and the difference, whatever it is, does not make it easier to accept her compassion. Her quizzical way, when she chose that, was much more tolerable. An impending Pine must have an influence. She is going through spiritual changes. I suppose this has been inevitable. She was in a state of war. I wonder if she ever will make peace. After all, it is dreadfully difficult to think of Laura as married. To be sure, I have much the same feeling about Sarah, if in a lesser degree. I have pictured a married Sarah. But not often.

(It grows increasingly difficult to officiate at these mental marryings. I remember the twinge it gave me to marry Laura to Pine; how I mentally divorced them, and no harm done. Surely there is a deepening complexity in the effort to fancy the modern girl as married. She never gives even the meagerest lift to any effort toward such a visualization. There is nothing to go on. "The blushing bride!" Where have the blushers gone? Shall Doctor Freud or any of his multiplying disciples tell us? That they have stopped blushing doesn't need to mean that they have stopped marrying, or stopped thinking about it, either. It may mean only that marrying has stopped making them blush. This may be flattering either to marriage or to the brides. Only profound expertness is likely to know. Meanwhile, how is a person to fit one of these unblushing, level-looking girls into a bridal image?)

Perhaps jesting is the safest pursuit for a man on the side-lines.

There was a night when the three of us went to a military show at the Garden; and another when Pine completed the quartet at a Red Cross concert in an odd little church. Pine looked perplexed. These are days of perplexity to men who think as he does. When I recalled Drynd, straight, slim, earnest, tinglingly eager for

the vast adventure, Pine filled me with fury; particularly when I saw him walking beside Sarah.

This was on the way home. Laura in this pair-off seemed inclined to avoid bickering. She wore a very sober frock. I thought she was a trifle pale, and this gave her eyes a certain soft brightness.

She told me of a letter she had from Rudley. There must have been a thrill in it, for he had passed through the lively ordeal of an encounter with the German "tango fliers." The enemy had appeared to leap out of a cloud. Rudley and two other airmen were outnumbered, three to one. Only sheer luck saved them in their plunge to safety—sheer luck and the fact that on this occasion the boches were "rotten marksmen."

The letter was written in high spirits, Laura said. She would show it to me.

I was able to give her a bit of narrative he had written concerning an enforced landing during a scouting trip, brought about by shortness of petrol; and how in a little, flowery French village they had never heard of, and in which American fliers never had been seen before, they were fêted by the quaintest imaginable group of people, including children who stared and cried out with funny sounds, and one or two astonishingly pretty girls who embarrassed them with flowers they couldn't carry in their machines and had secretively to drop as they started their engines.

"I see," said Laura. "He mentioned the danger to me and the romance to you."

It was, I suggested, awkward to be sentimental with one's sister. "And it may be," I said, "that he distrusts your sympathy for romance."

"Do you?" she asked me.

"I'm not an expert," I said. "And besides, I don't understand you at all."

"But *you* told me the story."

"It was only a fair swap. I hadn't thought of it as romance."

"Then perhaps I do know romance when I see it."

"I hope so," I said. "That ought to make life a lot more interesting."

Here she amazed me by remarking, "I'll never be content simply to watch romance."

### III

Last Monday afternoon I received a letter from Vicky Drynd—Sallison himself handed to me the puzzling envelop.

It had been a damp, coolish day. The city looked driven and preoccupied. On certain days streets have a way of turning their shoulders to you. On others they seem to stare without reserve and without sensibility. On the friendly days there is a real glow of something gracious in streets, something more than is brought to them by the imagination. That master gilder, the sun, has much to do with the effect, I have no doubt. Sunlight in New York has an unmitigated frankness, a slashing style, whether it is blistering the tar-smeared traffic spaces in summer or demonstrating spectra in the water-pipe icicles of winter. There is a bar of it, not more than a foot wide, that slants into my cavern beyond the window every afternoon. In an hour it has slipped away after proving once more that a certain iron shutter is not far from dropping off its one holding hinge.

This Monday was marked for me by a sense of unusual activity in the shop. Lorkey's hair had an angry disorder in it. Even the ordinary procedure, as of the tractor affair that distributes its layers of lining on the long, shiny cutting-table, seemed to be affected by an accelerating pressure. The air of the rooms was gloomy. The faces looked closed.

I may have ascribed some of these effects as a result of a Rosa Crooch incident. Once in the hot days Rosa fell straight backward without warning to her mates, and there was a great scurrying for water, and various strange suggestions as to the best way to revive a person who has fainted. In the afternoon of Monday a commotion of so marked a character that the stoppage of work became entirely undebatable sent me to the door of the "long room," then to a group which again surrounded Rosa, this time in a seizure that was more baffling than any swoon. I caught a glimpse of her blue lips, and of her eyes, fixed and protruding in a cataleptic stare. Vivirato lifted her from the floor to one of the tables. Sina, whimpering, slapped one of the girl's hands, while Mortensen belabored the other with a violence that threatened to produce a fracture. Probably the open eyes and the rights of the work-table checked Berg with the fire-bucket. I saw a wet handkerchief passing over the convulsed face. Then suddenly Rosa sat up, sobbed, scowled, and slid to her feet. She pushed away several sympathetic hands and insisted upon seating herself at her machine.

It was when I was turning away that Sallison handed me the letter. It said:

DEAR MR. GRAYL,—You will be surprised to get this letter but I would like very much if I could see you. You proved yourself a good friend and I'm a good friend of yours too that's saying something with the World the way it is. I wish you could come tomorrow night. Will you please—I'll look for you sure. You know the second floor right they always have the front door open.

VICKY DRYND.

She must have mailed this in the morning. It was written in a large, loose hand on blue paper with a gorgeous gilt "D" in the corner. I congratulated myself that she had given me a day's margin of time. That evening did not bring a calling mood.

By the time Tuesday evening came, after a day with an autumn lift in it, I was in better key for the adventure, though still nervous enough. It was quite clear in my mind that she would want money, so that I made it a point with myself that I could not be disconcerted by the element of surprise. There was a satisfaction in magnifying this sense of preparation. And I told myself that I must not assume that anything she suggested was to happen precisely as she arranged it. I must have some sort of firmness. If it was man's privilege to supply money to women, it was his privilege also to haggle reasonably as to the amount. Her ludicrous assumption that I was rich should meet its natural rebuff . . . if she went too far. I was not sure as to the measurement of too far.

(My aunt has taken a positive stand upon this subject of money. "If you are going to turn over your earnings to a soldier's wife, I sha'n't accept any board money from you." "My dear aunt," I said, "are you going to call that pitiful ten dollars a week anything more than conscience money in return for your splendid hospitality?" "Not a cent," she insisted. "I don't know how much you have, but it won't last forever. And I don't need it. I won't take money from a man who is clothing soldiers. When the war is over . . ." Nothing could better illustrate the sentimentality behind my aunt's shrewdness.)

As I knocked on Vicky Drynd's door I realized how often being prepared is being fooled. I was as bereft of preparation as if it were something one might leave behind him under a chair.

Vicky swung open the door with a genuine manner, a manner suggesting close study of the higher movies; and I must confess that she looked stunning. She made so charming a picture that if I could be said to have had a thought it was that she certainly hadn't wished to see me about money. The error in this deduction prob-

ably has occurred many times before, and through no fault of women. I should have had a theory that she would have chosen, if she wanted money, to produce an individual effect of destitution. And she didn't look at all destitute. She looked like a bud, an unfolding one, with a diaphanous corolla. She wore one of those frocks that neither begin nor end very definitely. It wouldn't do to assume that it was cheap because there was very little of it. In fact, I have understood that the expensiveness of frocks is in a ratio inverse to their volume. However this may be, Vicky's dress seemed to suggest an artistic intention. It became possible to know that she has beautiful arms and a roundness of body that could hardly be guessed in ordinary clothes. Her skin is extremely clear, with a kind of luminous fairness. To a drunken man, or a man very much in love, I'm sure it could look incandescent.

She had the little fashionable shrug of the shoulder as she extended her hand—"full of tricks!" I said to myself in a bewildered wonder as to where she picked them up. I could see the tricks without being insensible to the effectiveness of them. I knew from the first moment that she had set out to etherize me. I could feel the stealing subtlety of the anesthetic. I suppose it was part of the success of the operation that I had no resentment. I was convinced—I am still convinced—that she has remarkable magnetism.

"You dear old sport!" she said to me. "I knew you'd come! I said to myself, 'If I ask Grayl to come he'll come!' And I was righty all righty, wasn't I? What is that when you *know* a person will do something? Ain't it a funny thing? I got that. I can *tell*. It just comes to me. I said to a friend of mine I knew he *wasn't* comin' the time he promised. I didn't even get dressed for where we was going. And he didn't come. Say, what a swell hat you got! Sit over here. Ain't it nice and cool now? I hate hot weather. Don't you?



It's tough when you're poor. If you was rich and had an automobile . . ."

"How is the baby?" I asked.

"The baby? Oh, mamma has him now. He ain't been very good. And besides—well, when you want to *do* something. Don't you see," and she caught one of my hands, "I don't want to take your money all the time."

"There will be more of it," I said. "I shall be getting into piece-work. You shall be having at least twenty-five in a little while."

"The idea! How—how can— You didn't promise that."

"If Drynd had kept on he would be earning more."

"You darlin'!" She gave my hand a pressure between both of hers. "You're a wonder. But—listen! I want to *do* something. I always wanted to. If I hadn't got married I would have done it by now. Ain't a girl a fool to marry? Listen!—I wanted to tell you—honest, I thought about it a lot before I wrote to you. How'd I know you wouldn't think it was just a touch—that I wasn't putting something over on you—just to blow myself? It ain't that at all. I'm awful economical—honest I am. I got a friend in Stillingham's—in the dress department. She tips me to good things. You'd be surprised to know what I got this dress for—you would, actu'ly. It was a shame to take it. Don't you think it's a wonder?"

"It's very beautiful," I said.

"That's nice of you. You understand a girl, don't you? You know just what I mean about *doin'* something. I said to myself, I said, 'Mr. Grayl will understand exactly.' I got a chance—that's just it. I got a chance to do something I want to do. I couldn't do it, either, if a certain man hadn't a crush—if he didn't think I was the goods—and if he hadn't a pull. Listen! this man can put me on the stage. No fake. No rotten

shows, either. He knows the big people. Sees them every day. But he says I need a few dancin' lessons—just a few. It's a cinch, he says, to make me right in a little while. A cinch. I got the figure, he says. Just a few steps—that's all I need. And maybe a few singin' lessons. I had some before I was married. I can sing, all right. Just a few more lessons. Now, if I could win out I wouldn't have to take the money from you."

"I wish you wouldn't worry about that," I said.

"I do, though. It don't seem fair. And if I could win out I wouldn't have to take it. There's good money on the stage if you get in right. And that's what I got a chance for. I got the chance if I can get these lessons. And this man says he'll *guarantee* me for a hundred dollars. That ain't much, is it?"

"I'm sure I don't know," I said, "what such things cost. It seems very little."

"Why, I know girls has spent three hundred on that game. One of them's gettin' fifty a week. Fifty a week! That's goin' some. And there's Miri—old Steve McGuire's girl—pullin' out two hundred a week, and a friend of mine told me she only spent *sixty* dollars for lessons. C'n you beat that? That's luck, all right. You have to have big luck to do a thing like that. Honest, a hundred's just playin' a sure thing when you're *guaranteed*. That's what he says. For a hundred."

She rested her hands on my shoulders and looked at me earnestly, her lips parted.

"Listen!—will you lend me a hundred? I'll pay you back—every cent. Honest to God. And then I won't have to take any more money from yer."

"Yes," I answered, feebly, "if it will help you. Though as to the stage—"

"You dear!" She flung her arms around my neck and kissed me violently. —"I *knew* you would! I just knew it."

"But I ought to tell you," I said, "that I think the stage is a very uncertain affair."

She sat back, her hands clasped before her, with no sign of having indulged in an unusual demonstration or of recognizing my benumbed situation.

"What do you mean, uncertain? You mean I ain't got a chance?"

"Not exactly that," I said. "I mean—"

"Oh, I know! You think it's wicked. Ain't that it?" She laughed, throwing her head back and showing the remarkable teeth she has. "Oh, say! Don't you believe all you hear, bo. Don't you believe it. I ain't no innocent virgin. I know how to take care of m'self, all right. I'm goin' t' win out. The thing is to get *on* the stage. See? They got t' keep the mob away, of course. They got to. They can't take every boob that comes along. This man says it. 'Get this,' he says. 'You got to have the *talent*.' That's just what I got. Talent. And the looks."

She laughed again.

"Honest, ain't I got the looks?"

"There's no doubt about that," I admitted.

I think she meditated another demonstration.

"But you ain't so sure about the talent," she said, with her face very close. "Of course. You don't know. You'll come and see me the first night I get on—and give me a hand—that's if it's in New York. You know I might go on the road."

On the road. It flashed into my mind that poor Drynd would be on the road soon . . . on the road in France; the road to the front, where men act their parts without getting a hand; where the orchestra of the guns crushes the spoken word and heroism is a pantomime; where prompters read from the book of Fate and stage-managers mark the exits and entrances of Death. . . .

"What are you thinkin' about?" asked Vicky.

"About Owen," I said.

"Oh!"

Her face sobered for a moment.

"Owen? I suppose you would think about him. You got his job. And you're givin' up what you get for it. He's got what he wants. Ain't that so? He writes to me it ain't so bad. He has good times. He said he guessed I could get the box-factory all right. Well, he has another guess comin'."

"You will tell him about this—this work you're going into."

"Of course *not!*"

She clutched my arm. "For God's sake, don't *you* tell him. He'd have a fit. He'd know I didn't have the baby."

"It would be too bad to hurt him," I said.

"This ain't goin' t' hurt him. He ought to be glad enough—when he leaves his wife to get along by herself. Listen! you look awful sad. You ain't sorry you promised to lend me the hundred, are you?"

"No, I'm not sorry," I said. "I'm sorry only that—"

"Oh, say! Don't you be afraid. It 'll be all right. He's got what he wants. I got my life, too, ain't I?"

#### IV

Vicky Drynd's life, once she had receded again from the immediate foreground, began to seem unfixed, unreal. I had placed her in the scheme of things, and she twitched, flickered, threatened to become vaporous, to dissolve out of the picture. Drynd was fixed; I was fixed; there was nothing to hold Vicky. Yes, she had a "call," too; there was something she always had wanted to do, and she was going straight after what she wanted. There were no complexities. War was not a haunting cry. It had taken Owen Drynd, and he had preferred to let it take him. So much

for him. So much for war. And I, having functioned as a facilitator, was the logical stair for the feet that would dance.

Well, as to that, who could forecast the destiny of Vicky Drynd? Who could say that she was not a future Mimi or Pavlowa? She had her dream. Seemingly it shone very clear, though evidently more as a situation than as an expression. Possibly this is the most frequent fact about dreams.

Take the case of Aunt Paul's little dream about suffrage. She didn't want expression very urgently. I'm sure of that. Yet her dream was extraordinarily brilliant.

And it has come true.

The drama of this realized desire had a splendid crescendo, for it brought that parade on Fifth Avenue, attenuated arena for so many emotional spectacles. Had I not seen Joffre there, and the Blue Devils, and the kilties, and the draft boys? Had I not seen twenty thousand Red Cross nurses, stepping in proud and passionate steadiness, faces up to the glory-light of that glittering Coliseum? Had I not hovered at vantage-points for glints, through crevices in the crowds, of colors significant and thrilling, of faces tense, vivid, incredibly multiplied, as if a world were being spilled through a funnel? Had I not marched for miles, wriggling around corner congestions, to the brassy roar of bands, like a thought flickering in the shadow of a thing?

The suffrage parade was a gesture that prophesied a voice. It was a mute challenge with a magnificent background, for here was the Woman power that had reached the consciousness of the man-world as it never had been reached before. Here were the war-census women, the money-gatherers for the Liberty Loan, the war nurses, the stitchers and reapers and machine-shop women, the munition-workers, the railway guards in uniform. And then the "mothers, sisters, wives, and

sweethearts" with their service flags—a throbbing note in that symphonic spectacle.

But for me one figure transcended in interest all that moved in the vast procession.

I mean the figure of my beloved fat aunt—*carrying a banner!*

I could not have foreseen the stupendous impressiveness of this revelation. Pauline Rowning, the serene, the shrewd, the whimsical, the Successfully Single superbly fat aunt of my devoted admiration—carrying a banner. She stood out for me like the emphasized image in a noble mural pageant, bearing the oriflamme of a holy crusade, and theegis of chaste good humor. She was appalling and she was appealing. She was allegory. She was St. Pauline. And her dress fitted her wonderfully.

I ran for three blocks, with my hat in my hand, looking for a hole in a human barricade through which I might squeeze at any cost to catch her eye with a salute. But I was in a bad place for such an enterprise. And she never would have seen me. She looked straight ahead. In the momentary glimpses she seemed never even to wink. She stared at a goal. Something was happening to her. Something was happening to that peering, grinning, cheering crowd. Something was happening to the world. What that something was appeared on Election Day.

Very late on the evening of Election Day, when she was sure that the ballot battle had been won, my aunt gave us a special supper, a superior supper, including a bottle of Burgundy she had been saving for a long time.

"The next battle," she said, "will be the battle against booze. But I don't believe in throwing away stock in hand."

She was radiant.

"Really," I said, "it's a great misfortune that Aunt Portia couldn't happen in."

"Poor Aunt Portia!" cried Sarah. "Think what this must mean to her!"

I suggested that it was likely to mean much less than Sarah imagined. Aunt Portia's anti-ism was mostly a pose, a pose that was always ugly, but that once had a kind of haircloth-sofa respectability. That was the sad part of it—that my uncle's wife, who set such store by certain newnesses, should have picked out a moth-eaten pose at the last.

"But suppose it is a *conviction*?" Sarah advanced, argumentatively (she is driving one of my aunt's cars).

"I refuse to be insulting to my aunt," said I. "It's as much a pose as her serving soup at a soldiers' canteen on Twenty-eighth Street with a forty-dollar-a-week chauffeur heroically smoking cigarettes in her limousine at the door."

"We laboring people—" Sarah tossed out, with a grimace.

"Oh, it's very gentlemanly of you, Sarah, to stand by the posers in your own crowd. The hysterical posers get in everywhere—everywhere. They're cluttering France to-day. Heaven knows how they got over—not women like Aunt Portia, who can do things if they want to. Useless women. Just females. Real workers can't move around there without stepping in one. You remember what Colonel Tannard said about their taking their maids—'For God's sake, let them have them. The maids at least can do something.'"

All this time I could see that Aunt Paul was humorously meditating a remark.

Suddenly she said, "If I thought you two youngsters could keep a secret I should tell you something."

"Out with it," demanded Sarah.

"Your Uncle George told me—voluntarily—that he was voting for suffrage. I leave you to judge whether he deserves to be protected by an appropriate silence."

"I'll protect him," said I, fervently.

"Of course," continued Aunt Paul, "I refuse to sanction any disrespect to your Aunt Portia."

"We understand perfectly," said Sarah. She decided to add, "I *hope* Anson does."

"He does," I said. "I'm not merely a spasmodic respecter. I have the habit. All the same, Sarah, it will be awfully hard for you to explain to your grandchildren that once upon a time there really were certain women who didn't want a certain honorable privilege, and who could, therefore, get along quite comfortably without it, but who were willing to sit up nights thinking of ways of keeping other women, who did want that privilege, from getting it. The female anti-suffragist—not the male—will be the hardest to understand of all the figures in history."

"Good heavens!" protested my aunt, lifting her glass, "think of their being figures in history! But it's all over, isn't it? *Væ victis!* Naturally I recognize your right to a reasonable expansiveness. In this party you represent the element that—eh—"

"That turned the trick?"

"That—what was it the man said in front of the bulletin-board?—'struck off the shackles from millions of women.'"

"Think of that!" murmured Sarah, solemnly.

I should have tolerated anything from Sarah on that evening, for I knew that she was elated by more than an election result. The morning paper had a mention of Rudley's name, and before noon there was a letter from him. She has been reading all sorts of air literature—frantically. If there were a feminine flying corps there would be no holding her. I could see in her face, too, something that does not spare those who watch the skies. Guynemer was gone. One of Rudley's warmest friends, a Captain Hartlet, has disappeared in a bombing raid. That vista is murky, blood-streaked at times. Always it is laced with horrible lightnings—clear-sky lightnings



through which the winged shuttles weave their way defiantly. Sarah's vision of the supreme adventure must carry its specters.

## V

The letter which at this junction interested me most was from my father.

Once before he had indicated an attitude of question with regard to the factory. I could not be sure as to what was in his mind. There was an element of uneasiness, grimly hidden behind an effort to be jocular. I knew his theories of respect for the younger. He was not the man to intrude upon a purpose, even when it seemed a fanaticism, without the gentlest reconnaissance. Yet there was an effect of suggestion, as if to prepare the way for something more specific.

The new letter brandished a definite proposal. Colonel Wysant, of the Ordnance Department, wanted a man . . . and so on. Not a hint of paternal intrigue. Quite as if the colonel's wish had leapt out of the sky. And I was just the man. My success in chemistry, with which I never had done anything, pointed to the opportunity as with a commanding finger. . . . The colonel had even hinted that there might be a commission.

Dear old father man! "A commission." That would have stared at him with a transfixing fascination—not as a trick to endow me with the protective coloration. I have no doubt there are many ways of acquiring khaki. It would lure him not merely as a means of dragging me out of the factory, but specifically as a means of giving to me a sense of closer participation. It would be in Washington. There would be a wonderful outlook . . . and all that.

The letter left me grateful, and uncomfortable. I mentioned the gratitude, and asked him to let me think of the suggestion for a while. I knew I should never do the thing he asked. It did not appear to come as the

appointed thing; at least at that moment. This adherence to the path I am following does not seem obstinate. Perhaps I shall see it differently. Heaven knows the look of things changes amazingly as the great drama unrolls.

Even here in the factory (I feel it about me even as I sit here at my home table), where, as one might say, I am shut in with muttering sounds, and the odor of cloth and oil, I get the echoes of the troubled earth. These echoes reverberate as in a cavern, a teeming cavern, holding its own noises, yet catching the strident strains of the great Outside. Where there are ears and eyes there are hearts, souls, soul struggles, wrestlings with intruding beasts, the measuring of things, the making of terms, the eying of threats, the skeptical attention to perpetual beckonings.

Skeptical—yes, I must come back to that. These people about me are skeptical. Sometimes they have the open sneer, sometimes the emotional question. They are a real bit of the world, and, like the rest, they have been fooled much. We are fooled mostly by ourselves, but this but adds sharpness to the sting.

There is skepticism as to this war “prosperity” and what it may come to. Not anxiety; simply an incredulity, a take-what-is-here temporizing, and bitter complaint of the higher prices everywhere, as if an invisible and sinister force—not other men’s “prosperity” or any simple cause and effect—were devising the annoyance.

The adding of another state to the suffrage column drew its share of comment. Aunt Paul would have enjoyed the turgid twenty minutes in which Axel Troke laughed away the extraordinary delusion of woman’s equality with man; in which a cutter named Grimmel described a fearful woman he knew who came from a state where women voted; in which Jakow asked whether women might not do pretty well with a game which men had so contemptuously neglected; and in which Dolores

Oronato, her inky eyes flashing like those of some dreadful screen "close up," cut in with an excoriating tirade describing, in long-legged, short-breathed sentences, her profound scorn for the natural stupidity of men.

It was Browsel who summed up. He did it briefly. "It won't make no difference. The gang 'll run it just the same."

The whole discussion couldn't have been more kaleidoscopic or more inconclusive if it had been held in one of the highly intellectual forums.

When the manager, Heiser, stopped me in a passageway to ask what I thought about the suffrage victory I could see that he was choosing an occasion to be friendly. He made no concealment of a special interest. There is something very direct about him that would render a subterfuge, if not impossible, at least quite transparent.

"My sister worked very hard for it," he said. "I don't know whether you understand that over on the East Side we have very progressive women. Jewish people are great readers and thinkers. I was an East Side boy—grew up there."

This confidence being *à propos* of nothing at all, I found myself much at a loss.

"You know," he went on, "I got my start—my mind-start, if you could say it that way—from a man who somehow caught hold of a bunch of us boys. I guess I couldn't have had the same ideas if I hadn't met that man. No; I would have been different. I guess most of the boys would have been different. And I had a good father, too."

Heiser looked at me intently, through his horn-rimmed glasses, then turned his head reminiscently.

"This man knows you."

"Knows me?" Evidently Heiser's special purpose was being brought forward.

"Yes. He must know you pretty well. He didn't

mention your name. Of course not. But he told the story at a meeting of our club. I was the only one who knew who he meant."

I asked this man's name, and found a feeling of inevitableness in hearing that it was Zorn.

"But how did he know?" I demanded. "I haven't seen him for a long time. He has been away."

"At Hog Island," said Heiser. "He's been helping to make ships."

Heiser never could have surmised how mysterious this would be to me; how puzzling it was to account for Zorn's knowledge of anything I was doing, and to account for his expounding me in this way without a personal word to say that he was in the city. Heiser was more interested to explain to me the wonderful picture Zorn had drawn, by way, evidently, of enforcing some preachment about service.

"I wish I could tell you," declared Heiser, "how he said it—how you couldn't get into the war, but how you took a man's place. . . . I was astonished. You know I never thought of such a thing. Never. It seemed funny, too. I couldn't make you out, exactly. I'll say that honestly. I couldn't. And I might as well tell you I never thought you could do what you have done. It just shows. I could make a point out of that that he didn't take up at all—that intelligence counts—"

"Good heavens!" I cried. "You're not going to make me out a tailoring prodigy, are you?"

"You know what I mean," Heiser went on, his face flushing. "There's a point there. An educated man *can* jump ahead in any trade. . . ."

He was much impressed with this idea. I fancied his taking me as a text . . . at his study club or somewhere. It was startling and absurd. I didn't want to be a text. I wanted to be left alone. Even Zorn's anonymous tale was an extremely disquieting circumstance.

I think Heiser saw that I became quite miserable.

This might account for his fumbling expression of an eagerness to make me as comfortable as he could in the factory. And he wouldn't say a word to any one. It was no one's business. But he thought it would be the most honest thing to tell me that he knew. Didn't I think so?

I did think so, and thanked him, rather shortly, perhaps. My mind had turned to Zorn.

That night I found my Hog Island shipbuilder in his eyrie. A white-haired priest was leaving his door as I approached it. I was not in time to intercept the bang of that door which expressed the host's invariable emphasis.

When Zorn shuts a door it is never with the effect of any sort of punctuation short of a period, so that in knocking I felt the reluctance of one who may be disappointing some inhospitable expectation. Yet the moment he became visible I knew there was welcome.

He was far from effusive. I had to pump hard for any information I drew from him in those first minutes. Yes, he had been working in the shipyard, and a huge and magnificent tragedy it was. Tragedy? Yes. So many blunderers like himself, and the pitiful need holding a hard-pressed United States to a fantastic patience. Nevertheless, he had improved. In fact, at last he was probably worth having. He was going back again in a few days, when some troublesome things were cleared up. There were people he wanted to see—a lot of them, including the family of one of the shipyard workers. He had wanted to see me, particularly after he heard of what I was doing. But there was a mess of things. Amazing and distressing. And inspiring, too, for that matter. Mostly, coming back into the city was depressing. The people were not awake. Lord, no! not awake; still gluttoning, giggling, lolling as in the orchestra chairs at a show, while American sons were sobbing out their lives on the red fields of France.

## VI

"Fortunately," cried Zorn, "if we become depressed, we are able to remind ourselves that it is by the spectacle of those who are left behind—I mean left behind the front of effort. You don't suppose I forget those who are at our home front any more than I forget Rudley over there, riding the wind and looking hell in the eyes."

This reminded him of Rudley's sister. He had seen her since he came back. She was a remarkable girl—quite as you would expect.

I recalled the tone in which Laura had said that Zorn would be likely to understand.

"She told me about you," said Zorn.

"I suppose," said I, "that I can't avoid being expounded."

"Why should you?" Zorn rasped out with something like petulance. "If you're doing a decent thing, why resent discovery?"

"I don't. You must know that. Yet one may be irritated—"

"Good God! Perhaps you will want to flay me for speaking of you!"

"No," I protested. "I heard of that." He glowered formidably. "I was simply puzzled to understand how you would know; which was very childish, I admit."

"I think it was," said Zorn.

"Now, with Laura Rudley it was different."

"Why different?"

"Perhaps I thought of her as not exactly sympathetic."

"Wrong," declared Zorn. "Utterly wrong. In my opinion you were very highly honored by the way she went about it. What extravagant form of sympathy are you looking for? It is only putterers who want sympathy. You can't mean that."

"Thank you for that defensive qualification," I said, rather warmly. "I was not thinking of her sympathy for me. I was thinking of her sympathy for the cause—or the lack of it; of her interest, for example, in a subtle slacker. If I am to be honest, maybe that was in my mind."

"A slacker?"

"I suspect she is going to marry a very pleasant Anarchist person."

Zorn searched me with his queer eyes.

"Who is that?"

"Lawrence Pine, the poet."

"She didn't mention him."

"I'm astonished. She admires him tremendously."

"She should if she's going to marry him," Zorn said, dryly. "As for his being a poet, God knows we need poets. The world never needed them so badly."

"But I like them best," I said, "when they take hold—like D'Annunzio. Pine is a slacker. And knowing her feeling toward him could not leave me very comfortable as to any description she might venture to offer—"

"I tell you," declared Zorn, with a sharp gesture, "that she spoke with the utmost respect—more than that—"

"Please don't console me," I protested. "Evidently I'm making myself ridiculous to you. I'm only glad if this indicates that she's coming around."

"Coming around . . .?"

"Warming up to the war cause—despite Pine."

"Warming up? Do you happen to know what she's doing this minute?"

"No."

"Working night and day—literally. Night and day. It's splendid. Not dabbling—*working*, with the energy—well, of a Rudley. At first she was for the plunge into nursing—she knew there never could be too many

nurses. Then she was dismayed to hear that relatives of soldiers abroad couldn't themselves go across. That ban, I'm sure, will be lifted. But for the moment it did daunt her. She wanted to go to France, to get into the thick of things. Then something or other came up that made her see how much there is to do right here that has no frippery in it. That's what took her into the tenements—wherever there is a soldier's wife or a soldier's mother. It was at this juncture, by the way, at the beginning of her work, that her father came upon the scene."

"Her father?"

"The old brute has met with some sort of an illumination, or thinks he has. No real contrition, you know. Has a way, evidently, of acting as if past scenes were negligible. Took her in his arms. Can you understand such men? Wanted to know about Robert—he has seen something in the papers. And woke up. The old fool!"

Zorn found one of his awful cigars.

"Well, he dragged her off for dinner, talked about his enormous war contracts, paraded his adventures in plunder. I don't suppose he was dangling these things as such men like to dangle them in the presence of a woman. He wanted to talk, to be the great man in reminiscence, and here was his daughter. It was an occasion. I can see him inflating himself. Within the hour she was up. 'I must go,' she told him. 'Go where?' says he. 'Can't you see him stare?' 'To work,' says she. Oh, it must have been a choice moment! I gathered that she was exceedingly brief in explaining the character of her obligations, and it's a safe guess that she left behind her one of the most astonished gamblers in the country."

"You've told me something I'm very glad to hear," I said.

I was glad to hear also Zorn's account of the ship-



yard when that came suddenly to the surface. There was little of himself. Whatever may have happened to him physically—and that must have been an upstanding consideration—his own bones were forgotten in that vivid characterization. He saw men, a babel of men; it was as if he saw in it all a kind of ethnological parable, splashed with strange colors, with streaks of grotesque selfishness and astounding devotion—absolutely astounding. There was the rumble of an enormous life, the mutterings of the elemental male animal in mass action, droll gleams of individual perversity as well as individual pluck—spurtings, bright as blood, of the very inner most of men. And there they were, when you got the slant, like a swarm of insects weaving fantastic scaffoldings and rearing at last those great hulls, monsters which, when they had been fitted with vitals, would snort into the open sea and forget the hands that made them. The bigness of these units of production made the men seem little, individually insignificant. It was symbolical. The ship was like a state or a world—or a heaven. Only a mass could produce it. And yet—Zorn swung his cigar significantly—they were a mass of *men*, irreconcilably individual in spite of themselves, with unquestionably individual needs—

“And desires,” I said.

“Yes, yes! I could tell you of some amazing confessions. It is positively stupefying to find how short a shot some imaginations make. You must have found that—the pitiful *littleness* of most dreams. It is the difference in the size of dreams that keeps men apart, that makes the muddle. It is harder to reconcile little dreams than big ones. Big ones blend at the top.”

Zorn, a bit haggard about the eyes, stood there for a moment, staring over my head. Then he turned to scrutinize his cigar, attacked it violently, and the top of him disappeared in a cloud.

The voice from the cloud went on:

"Take the dream of victory. It will make a huge difference whether the dream is of a cure for the symptom, the present pain, or a cure for the disease itself. We don't want a peace that is an opiate. There always will be the flabby millions who are satisfied with that—dope-eaters. We want the peace that sings the triumphant suffering of a cleansed body. . . ."

## VII

A letter from Owen Drynd told me that he expected to be in New York very soon, because everybody said they were going over.

"There don't seem to be no use writing to her," he said. "She's only sent me one letter in a month. I call that rotten. She didn't say a word about the baby. Not a word. I wish you'd ask Lorkey to tell me how things is there. A man feels awful sore when he don't get letters. Thank you, Mr. Grayl, for all you done."

Lorkey had mentioned on several occasions his difficulty in finding Vicky Drynd at home. When I told him of Owen's wish he had a sneer ready.

"I tell you that girl ain't playin' straight with him. I ain't goin' to tell him, am I?"

"What do you mean?"

"Where does she git the clothes she's wearin'? I know she's got the allowance money, and your money, too." He looked at me inscrutably. "But she's goin' it pretty strong—she looks like the white lights—fur things and sporty hats. I seen her in a taxi with a guy. Can yer beat that?"

Perhaps Lorkey measured my depression.

"He can't blame *us*, can he? That's the way women is. What d' they care about a man s'long as they got his money?"

"Lorkey," I said, "you're a cynic."

"I'm *on*," said Lorky. "That's what it is. I'm on."

Say, what d'yer think Sina said the other day? 'Nothin doin' with me on this marriage stuff,' she says, 'unless he's got a automobile.' That's women, every time. Listen—her father's a butcher, a hard worker. There's six of them, and Sina only drops in four dollars for board—four dollars! What does she do with her money? Tell me that."

"The sensualities of shopping explain a good deal, Lorkey," I said, without thinking of him at all. He looked at me blankly.

I was thinking of Owen Drynd's letter and of the boy who will be coming northward; who will have a brief day or two in that vague interval between the city and the sea; who will be one of the specks on the rim of a transport ship, and vanish in the great pause. . . . The sea will be very cold, for it is December.

## VIII

Heiser handed me the official letter.

It was as simple as a scythe. It said that Drynd had died of pneumonia.

There was a special word from a lieutenant in Drynd's company telling me that when the boy went down under the fever he had asked that my name be written in the records, so that notice was going to me as well as to his wife. He was a fine lad—had been made a corporal two weeks before—and they were deeply grieved to lose him. . . .

I waited long enough to tell Heiser, then went away to see the cobbler or the dancer, I didn't know which. My feeling that Vicky Drynd never had told Owen of her changed place of living somehow persisted. I knew that old Drynd one day had gone to see his grandson at the home of Vicky's mother, and that he had not been made welcome. It was more than likely that old Drynd did not know of the change. He avoided men-

tion of his daughter-in-law. There had been no occasion for speech on my part. In any case, the official letter to the soldier's wife might be presumed to have gone to the old address as first given, where its passage would be halted unless the forwarding had been established by the sub-station.

I went out into the gray day with rebellion and dread. Poor Drynd! "Died—of disease." It had been there, in the catalogue of hazards. But he would not have thought of that. No soldier would; certainly not the Drynd kind of soldier. No man not in the clothes of a fighting unit can rightly say what a soldier would think, but it is plain enough that some things would be excluded. Dying before the great chance came would be far from the thought of a man so eagerly welcoming the rumble of that fighting summons. . . .

He had told me how well he was; that he was thinner but stronger, and "ready for 'em." He wondered if he would see England, or go straight to France; and what their chances were of getting very soon into the real fighting. . . . One could picture the browned vigor of him itching to get nearer, to see and hear the stupendous Thing.

I have often wondered whether he sat, as I have, studying that wriggling black line on the map, with its inexplicable salients . . . pushing, pushing, as if to straighten out the loops and drive the line backward until it should run magnificently past the French and Belgian borders, back to the Rhine, to Prussia, to Berlin. Very likely he would not have cared for maps. Old men and weaklings have to be content to push black lines with their eyes. Maps are made when straight, strong, gun-carrying men get through.

And now he was gone, as definitely as if he had thrown himself upon a bomb to save his company. Yet not without victory. Ah, no! Drynd! You may have missed glory, but not victory. You gave up your life.

You neither asked nor received a choice as to how you should do that. You had nothing to gain. You went away to fight for a country that has nothing to gain. And you gave all. That was victory.

I came to a street corner where I must decide between the father and the wife—as to which I should visit first with my tidings. It might have been a small matter. Yet it was not. If I had gone first to the father . . . well, the story would have run somewhat differently.

When I turned into Vicky Drynd's street it was with no expectation that I should find her. I fancied myself temporarily released from that part of my mission and hurrying away, with a cowardly relief, to take up the other part of my burden. Even the grief of old Drynd did not seem so dreadful to contemplate as the chagrin of the wife.

I knocked at her door.

The silence for a moment seemed to confirm my skepticism.

Then the door swung open and I saw Vicky, cloaked and hatted, staring at me with the most grotesquely blank look I ever have seen in a human face. It was not fright. It was not mere astonishment. It was not outrage. Whatever her emotions were (I now know something of what they must have been), her face was not able to manage them. And she was speechless, though I saw her parted lips, loose, as in a kind of paralysis, trying to get to something.

When I made to enter, without being asked—somehow I felt little if any instinct of tenderness toward her—she backed away, still without a word.

Then I saw that the room was stripped, save for a clutter in one corner, and that two traveling-bags were near the door.

And I saw that another person was there. He stood between me and the windows. It was all perfectly clear.

I have been amazed to realize how completely the tale was told in that single glimpse.

"Well," said Vicky, at last, in a curious, stagey sort of voice, "you're here, ain't you?"

"I've come—" I began.

"That's all right. I didn't ask you, but you're here, and you might as well know—"

The man must have made a sound or a gesture, though I neither saw nor heard, for she turned her head sharply toward him, then was back at me.

"Yes, he might as well know. I don't care who knows. I'm goin' away—understand? Goin' away. I've found the man I love—yes, Eddy. I don't care who knows it! Who can stop me? *You* can't stop me!" She fixed a strangely defiant look upon me. "Besides, we're caught, ain't we? What do I care? You been pretty square. I ain't got anything against you now. I ain't goin' t' give up my life, am I?"

"You mean," I stammered, "that you're going to—to elope?"

The word sounded droll when I had said it. It was too decent.

"Cut it out!" came the voice of the man.

Then I really saw him.

He didn't look as he had looked when I saw him on the roof nor as he had looked when I saw him at the school-house and the wrist had saved him from the draft. He wore a mustache, a nasty little smear of hair. His arms shot straight down into the pockets of his long overcoat, and he writhed there with his eyes set angrily upon me.

"Cut it out!" he repeated. "What's it his business—"

"It is no business of mine," I said, groping toward a little better ground and feeling the flame rising in me the while—"no business of mine that you two should love each other—"

"Then leave us alone! What in hell—"

"I was only going to say," and I turned to Vicky with a sick sort of fury under the softest voice I could eke out, "that if you love this man there is no reason in the world why you shouldn't go and marry him decently, because your husband—"

"Much husband I have!" burst out Vicky.

"—because your husband is dead."

"*What?* My hus— What are you sayin' now?"

"He died on Saturday morning, of pneumonia."

"God!"

She sat down on one of the traveling-bags, slowly, tearlessly, her eyes very wide. I heard the crook person's feet move on the bare floor. I myself was stupefied by the cruel sound of the elemental words. Something like a nausea drew a haze over that bare room and the two figures, one on each hand, the man squirming and the girl stiffly, portentously seated there on one of the symbols of their bargain.

Suddenly she stood up and rushed toward him.

"Oh, Eddy!"

I didn't look toward them, but I knew that she had her arms around his neck. There was no sound from him; not a sound. Because I was looking away—wishing I could throw myself into the street—I could not see what passed between them unspokenly. I know only that in a moment, as if by something that was a quick matter with her—

"Say, Eddy—" she said, breathlessly, "you—we will be married, won't we?"

I don't know what she read in his face. I don't know whether there was anything to read there, whether it was simply his damnable silence that provoked her, but she had him by his wrist—the same wrist I had once encountered—and was glaring at him.

"Do yer mean, Eddy—?"

"Oh, hell!" he said, "what are y' playin'?"

He had his hands back in the pockets of his coat.

"That won't go, Eddy." She caught him as I had seen her take hold of Drynd. "Is this because he's here? Say it out. D'yer mean yer don't want t' marry me?"

"What's that got to do with it? You knew I couldn't marry yer."

"I *didn't* know it!" She screamed at him as she straightened her arms, throwing him back on his heels. "I *didn't* know it! Yer dirty devil. Yer never said a word—a *word*—that you was—yer sneakin' hound, yer! Why wasn't yer man enough—I wouldn't 've cared if—"

He put out his hand. "Say, you!"—this was to me—"you can go now, see? This 'll be about all."

"No!" shouted Vicky, in quite an imperious way. "Let him alone. Don't yer go, Mr. Grayl. You ain't makin' no hit with me, Eddy Snole. I c'n tell yer that!"

She walked the length of the room, flinging her head.

"One of us gets out," he snarled. "One of us—quick. Him or me."

"All right." She was barring my way, quivering as she stood there with her eyes on him. "You c'n go. As quick as yer like. Yer a cheap lyin' sucker. I got yer number. I—"

He reached the door in two strides. For a moment, with his hand on the knob, he had his face very close to hers. "You bitch!"

The door crashed shut behind him.

It seemed that she was going to walk straight after him without the formula of opening the door. Then I saw that she was standing with her face against the panel, sobbing, sobbing violently, as if the world had crumpled.

Some day, perhaps, I might be able to think out the kind of thing I should have said under such circumstances. I didn't think of it then. I was able to do nothing for a space but stand there and listen to her



inexplicable sobs . . . until she moved about, her shoulders propped against the door-frame, and said to me, without a quaver:

"C'n yer beat that!"

## IX

It began to grow dark as we stood there talking in that bare room. A low, horrible kind of gloom settled over the place. She had to gush that Eddy Snole story, moving nearer the window as if to trail the daylight, to keep what remained of her realities from being obliterated. It was sickening. There was no remorse. I think she rather expected me to be sorry that something very thrilling had been utterly spoiled for her; something that included a wonderful journey—to Mexico, she had it.

There was a moment when I thought of asking, "Do you know that this man is a thief?"

But it was too plain that this would have produced no salutary amazement. She never had idealized Eddy Snole; even if there had been, as it appeared, a point on which her pride, or what passes for that in such girls, could be reached. "Thief" would hardly have been crushing. And it would have involved further participation. I was through.

In the end I told her that I must go to Owen's father. This brought her to her dead husband. If there was any genuine grief in her face it did not show in that waning light. She thought only of herself. This was wretchedly clear by everything she said. In other circumstances I should have blamed her less. She was widowed. She had a child. Heaven knows there might have been a different case.

"You have spoken about 'your life' to me once or twice," I said at last. "I don't want to preach, but for Owen's sake, for your child's sake, make something of it. You will have your insurance money—"

"My *what?*" She was staring in the sickly twilight.

"You know that your husband was insured—that the United States will be paying you ten thousand dollars—"

"Ten . . ." She clutched at me with that catlike reach of hers until we were huddled at one of the windows.

"Ten thousand dollars. Owen must have told you—you had your notification?"

"He said something. . . . I got a paper . . . didn't read it—" She made a gesture as if to query whether it might be anywhere at all, now that everything . . . "Oh, my God! *Ten thousand!* Say—don't fool me—I'm all in—"

"He paid his insurance premium every month like all insured soldiers. He told me. The money will come to you—in payments—monthly payments."

I could see her straighten up as if some elixir were dribbling into her lithe body.

"It will give you a chance to do something with your life. It will mean a lot to you and to your child."

"Child! Hell! I ain't goin' to be tied down by *that!* Ten thousand dollars!" (The figures stuck fast in her mind.) "I don't care how it comes. Say! I'll make the whole damned bunch *sick!*"

And with that elation in it I thought her face the ugliest thing I ever had looked upon.

Yet I knew that Vicky Drynd had just seen, as in the white of a stupendous revelation, the clear road to her great desire, whatever it was.

This should have been the end of the Vicky Drynd part of my career, save for so much of it as came into that sad hour with Owen's father and mother at the back of the shoe-shop. But there was a postscript. It was as ugly as the part that preceded it.

The postscript came immediately after I had bruskiy left Vicky with her traveling-bags, and just beyond

the quaint turn in the old street. There is an ancient church there, and a high wall with a jog that casts a deep shadow when the street-lamp is lighted.

Eddy Snole, who is, I have no doubt, a master strategist in such matters, was suddenly at this spot, and placed so that, when I was intercepted, the jog in the wall was behind me.

My first impression was that his being there was ridiculous. It was against all chance in anything but melodrama that a man should keep popping up like this. Nevertheless, he was there, by the simple expedient of "laying" for me. It was obvious enough that he had been waiting. His plans were equally plain, though I have thought that he was halted to the extent of a pause by the situation in the street. He preferred that he should be unobserved, and perhaps he wished greater reassurance from the one direction in which there was a vista.

"You rotten cripple!"

He began rather bluntly, in what I think he would have admitted to be very bad form. He could not very well hope to introduce a surprise attack after that.

"You think you pulled off a smart trick, don't you?"

"Which trick do you mean?" I asked him. If he regarded this as sarcastic he couldn't know how annoyed I was that there should have been a series.

"I'm talking about this one, just now. But I'll settle for both at the same time."

He glanced quickly over his shoulder.

"It'll sort of ease things for me to break you up a little more—put a few more humps on you."

"Well," I said, "you really ought to remember that I'm a little in the breaking way myself."

Of course, it isn't needful to confide to an adversary that we measure our own chance as about one in a hundred. To be sure, I had a theory for use at the moment when his hand should come out. The theory

was concerned with his legs. Unfortunately, his overcoat was very long. There ought to be another theory. I was weighing one when he said:

"You won't get a chance. I'm goin' to make a good job of it."

"I don't believe you," I said. "You began wrong."

Whether his blow would have been started then I don't know, for there were footsteps at the turn in the wall. This meant that he must wait. It also meant that I could be free. Yet I stood there tensely. I had no practice in sneaking out of an encounter. I suppose it has a technic. There can be an exalted moment in physical danger, not less, I fancy, when the danger is vulgar and belittling, and even when it is still debatable. Perhaps there is a biting animal curiosity in the shadow of a catastrophe, a curiosity as to the feel of danger, as well as the sporting doubt in the matter of its reality. I thought of a number of things, looking at the silhouette of Eddy Snole, though vastly fewer, doubtless, than the number that came into my head afterward.

Snole lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "These are friends of mine. Just to clean up."

This made me laugh. It was such a feeble device to hold me.

"Say!" said a strong voice from somewhere back of Snole, and a figure came very close to him, so that he stepped quickly to one side, "ain't you Anson Grayl?"

I saw then that the figure wore a military uniform.

"If you ain't," said the soldier, adjusting himself to scrutiny, "you're a twin for him, sure. I'd 've bet—"

"You have hit it," I said, "but—" Even at a better angle I couldn't make him out.

"So!" He was extending his hand. "Holy mackerel! Think of it! In the wicked burgh. And you don't know your old side kick, Biff Hannigan! . . . Who's your friend?"

This was because the corner of his eye had caught something, and we both saw Snole running . . . running

ardently, electrically, in a kind of blur, and disappearing at last at the corner.

"An acquaintance of mine," I said, "who is, as I understand, going to Mexico."

"He's in a hell of a hurry," grunted Hannigan.

"Mostly your fault," I laughed. "I think he heard your name."

"What's the joke?"

I was right in thinking that Hannigan would enjoy the joke when he got it. I can see now this white black sheep of our Academy alumni sprawled back in my aunt's Morris chair, laughing and trying not to cuss, and my aunt sitting opposite and understanding perfectly just what he meant when he expressed the profundity of his grief that he couldn't have landed at least one on Snole.

"As for that," I said, "you spoiled a perfectly good fight."

But we all understood.

No one enjoyed the transfigured ring-fighter more than Sarah; no one drew from him more picturesque information. Needless to say, no one elicited more cordial attention to responsive comment. At first he was rather constrained and talked stiltedly. I think he began with the assumption that before my aunt he ought to be strictly formal, perhaps even literary. Aunt Paul soon cured him of that.

How he had gone to Plattsburg, had won his commission, had boosted boxing at Camp Upton (boxing and singing, he insisted, would knock a big hole in that war over there), had invested some money (to please a girl) in an uplift house at another place, where a fool woman was crabbing the game and spoiling everything; how he had put a crimp in next season's baseball by luring Bud Sleight and Maxingham into the war—yes, and had made Slossing chuck a ring chance and get into the only fashionable clothes; how he had everything

fixed right for going across and had just been down to see a nice old aunt of his who cried like she was his mother and gave him six pairs of awful socks—these and many other incidents of his whirlwind life Hannigan unfolded with a kind of objective enjoyment.

We did not touch certain personal matters in Brannington history.

To complete the incident, Laura Rudley, looking tired, but glowing as I have not seen her glow before, came in while Hannigan was telling us that he must go to his train.

“Rob Rudley’s sister? Well, this is some surprise-party all right! Wish I didn’t have to go. I heard Rob was sky-scraping. Hope I see him over there. He’s a sure winner.”

From the descending elevator cage he shouted up to me, “Say, old man, it’s too bad that guy got away!”

## X

I finished the week at the workshop, with the ghost of Owen Drynd walking with me through the passages, and the faces of his father and mother never for a moment far, as it seemed, from my elbow. And these obsessions affected the appearance of the walls, and the mounds of clothes and the faces about me. It was momentous to realize how much is added to life by the subtraction we call death.

How long I should have gone on (I had become infected by a sense of a compelling urgency in the work we were doing, a sense of the piercing need for every possible ounce of laboring power) I cannot be sure. The news of my father’s illness quite outweighed every other consideration for the moment. Other news on the same day accentuated the effect of a crumbling world. Rudley had been shot down, his plane crashing just within the French lines. What remains of him, if

he remains at all, it is impossible to figure from the despatch.

It was a distressing thing to see Sarah under the stroke of these two disasters, for my father's fever looked like nothing less. We never knew him to be ill, and the menace at once took on a portentous cast, as if some great tower that had stood with its brows in the cool blue, apparently as immutable as a mountain, were suddenly to reveal a vital crack at its base and to threaten a sudden and irretrievable collapse. It was unthinkable.

As I sat with Sarah in the train it came to me that every other wish I ever had known, every dream I ever had held as to his destination, as to mine—as to the destination of the world—was easily forgotten in the poignancy of the one desire that he might get well. I found that everything else had been predicated upon his strong, high, comforting security. I could see how readily one might be shaken in the finest philosophy by a single removal; how the will to live, except as it might rise as an ecstatic achievement of the mind, must always presume upon an articulation with other souls; how conditional any courage is likely to be. That passion of patriotism, for example; what splendor it must take on in the heart of a woman who can lift higher the sacrificial cup after visioning her boy's face stiffly upturned in the rain.

Sarah—not at once, but by the slow unfolding of a precious confidence—told me that in one letter Rudley had pledged all to her. “And you won't answer as to that until I come back.” He made her understand that it didn't seem altogether a piece of fair play to challenge an answer. “It makes me feel good enough to say this—that you mean everything to me—that I love to write your name in the clouds—and that I know you are right there at the end of the final flight.”

“The final flight.” I could see that this caught in Sarah's thought like a thorn.

"I should have done it sooner . . ." she was saying in a moment.

"Have done what?"

"I should be over there . . . instead of puttering here. But they are preparing hospitals on this side—a lot of them. I'm going to register. That will be something real. Laura has done it."

"Laura?"

"She began last week."

Presently she added, "They may send us over."

Father was too low to be conscious of our coming. He looked gaunt and appalling in the old bed. Mother wore a dreadful quiet, though she met us with a smile that expressed for me the ultimate beauty of patient affection.

It is snowing softly, steadily, as if the soul of the sky were being dissolved.

## XI

Father was conscious to-day. I am sure he will not die. Mother has always been sure. She says this now. Doctor Boynton is too old a practitioner to say anything of the sort. He has to be translated, like a thin hieroglyph wearing a soiled soft hat.

I am permitted to sit for hours watching that shaggy head on the pillow, and to do many things.

Toward evening, at a moment of the utmost quiet—at a moment, indeed, of fearful dumbness when the muffling of all outdoors seemed to be reflected in a silencing of the very pulse of home—and while I sat there with eyes on the wide window and the woven filaments of a vine, a voice boomed out of the void. It was as if a priest had intoned it at the crisis of a ritual.

"The Great Desire!"

When I looked about in astonishment, his eyes were full upon me and a strange recognizing friendliness



flickered in his face. I was awed into utter muteness by the way the words came.

"How about the Book?"

He spoke with an uncannily natural way, quite as if resuming an interrupted conversation.

"I'm living it," I said.

"Ah! Yes—living it . . . that is good! Life itself is the . . . important thing."

He insisted upon telling me of a dream he had just had. An absolutely clear dream. There was a wide space—it seemed like *all* space. A rolling country, you would say, though you could not see the country, partly because it was dark, very dark, and partly because the space was heaving . . . heaving as far as you could see . . . with bayonets . . . bayonets that heaved in two great masses toward each other, interminably in the gloom. And silently. There was no sound at all. This made the scene particularly ghastly and terrible. There was no clash. No booming. Absolutely nothing happened but the heaving of the vast masses of bayonets, which had a dark sheen, like phosphorus on a remote sea.

Then, somewhere toward the dim horizon he saw a figure higher than the mass, which came forward slowly, as a man breasting waves, and grew taller as it came. At last it was gigantic . . . he could see the arms swinging as in an effort of striking, and the feet finding a place, yet not seeming to choose where. It was amazing, that figure, with the heaving masses about its ankles.

There was a terrific instant when the figure paused, and then one arm was raised. . . . He could not describe the gesture except that it was as if a man in some dark place were to reach up to turn on a light. . . . It interested him tremendously to get at the details of this image. I grew uneasy at the length of time he was talking.

The wonderful thing, he said, thereupon happened . . . a great light *did* come, a light as of dawn, a dawn of a solemn yet golden beauty, flooding the whole of the

vast space, obliterating the majestic figure. And when he looked, with a strained and excitedly expectant interest, at the heaving masses of bayonets he saw that now they were blades of grass, grass tenderly, exquisitely green . . . now waving, waving buoyantly, smilingly, now leaping like green flames in the glory of morning.

He relapsed into silence, his eyes fixed upon the ceiling, as if he still sought the lineaments of that ineffable splendor.

"Light!" he murmured. "Light! . . ."

"You must rest now," I said. He gave no sign of hearing.

"Old-fashioned light—nothing new about it, no trick, nothing with a noisy name—plain light. That's what the world needs. We're all struggling along too much in the dark. . . . Light!"

"I'm bringing it," said my mother's cheery voice. "It seems to me some people are getting to be pretty smart." She was shading the little lamp with her hand.

My father turned his head sharply and flung one arm toward me over the coverlet.

"You see? When there is light I can see your mother. You'll testify that she wasn't here before!"

## XII

Sarah went back to the city to-day, assured that father is well past the danger-point. Her going on this particular day, in the midst of fresh snow, had some relation to her entrance on hospital training. Father was as insistent upon her going as upon my remaining. That I should for the time take his place in the affairs of the Academy was indispensable to his peace and progress. The colleges would go through revolution. This was inevitable. But the country must be steady and steadfast as to its preparatory schools. The new military-training idea must be tried out to the full. Prepared

manhood—that must be the ideal, and this began with prepared boyhood; with clean, strong boyhood that would have for cruel force a hatred strong enough to build a wholesome force that would ever put the cruel and the predatory in awe.

“You know,” declared my father, “there never was an hour of peace that did not have force behind it. Peace without force is a foolish dream—tragically foolish. Every natural thing tells the story of force. Nature keeps her books of discipline eternally balanced, and she never breaks a promise to use force where it is needed. Try to elude force and there is a crash or an explosion. Of course, the greatest force of all is thought. But this force needs a vehicle, billions of vehicles. To make an idea carry you must make a cartridge for it; that is to say that you must co-operate with other forces. Always there is the total sum of forces that neither can be increased nor diminished. Forces can be directed, but that which directs is one of the forces.”

“You are getting better,” I said.

His shadowy smile had its old manner, and he drove a fist under his pillow.

“For example,” he went on, presently, “in that matter on the other side, when the machine went down, there was the force of gravitation. But there was the force of Rudley, too. Sometimes it seems to take the whole catalogue of other forces to kill a man.”

We all had rejoiced when word came from Laura that Rudley was alive; that he was severely wounded, but likely to recover. It appears that the information had been elicited by strong-arm methods on the part of Wendell Rudley, who is the sort of person that would find out what he wanted to know, and who had communicated the results of his investigation to his daughter. Thus it had reached Sarah, in whom it at once lighted a flame. I shall never forget that illumination. It was not happy news, but it was news from the living. What

must it be to a man to have earned or to have gathered from the hand of the Divine Giver an affection such as shone in Sarah's eyes when she looked up from Laura's telegram? She wrote a long letter that night. I thought then that it was likely to be the kind of letter a man would willingly fall out of the sky to pick up.

Father had his bad days, days of weakness and quiet. At such times I was close, but guardedly audible. On such days he was much irritated by a matter such as Wigstone of our little faculty. I suspect now that Wigstone always irritated my father, but that when father was well he knew what to do with his irritation—how to balance those forces he talked about. While he was on his back Wigstone was too much for him, and I made it my business to get the man of Latin out of the way as soon as that might be done.

There was a day when father said to me, without preface, and quite as if the course of his thought had taken the track of speech:

"What year was that in which Lowell came? Was it— How absurd! You weren't born, were you?"

"Mother's diary will tell—if we can find something to guide us to the spot."

I went away to fetch a bunch of the brown books, knowing well where they were kept. There was little chance of finding the date, but the diary would be a diversion. I soon found that father was not very keen for the Lowell date; that he was ready to catch up the queer bits of narrative out of the past set down in mother's breezy yet always circumstantial way.

I read to him many passages out of the earlier books. He appeared utterly absorbed in an account of a certain controversy with the county authorities about a road-way. The one thing that made him laugh openly was a short passage. It said, "Frederick has started a collection of Berkshire fossils."

At a point in one of the books I found trace of a leaf torn out. This trifling but unique circumstance caught my attention and I paused in the slow turning of the pages. Why should a page be torn out? There was nothing in the page before to offer a hint of explanation; nor in the page that followed. I sat looking at the even lines, drifting away from the incident of the page to thought of the writer, turning absently on and on, when of a sudden, by one of those eye chances never to be explained, I saw it. It seemed to stare, as if it had been written in blacker ink:

*Frederick is terribly chagrined about Anson's fall. He feels as if he never would forgive himself if he had really hurt him. I've had to cheer him up. There isn't the slightest sign of a hurt.*

She had gone back, Heaven knows how long after, to tear out the page that told of the mishap. This after-allusion, a few pages farther along, had escaped her. . . . When by-and-by the Sign came there would be no allusion. I was sure of that. If there was any equivocal line, I didn't wish to look for it. It was enough to believe that at this moment, all unsuspecting, the man in the bed was watching me.

But he was asleep. With his eyes closed he looked as if stricken by the bolt that fell in those lines I had read. He had begun to have a stubble of beard that put a gray shadow over his mouth.

I looked at him with a stifling terror. I was afraid that he might open his eyes and see me at this moment. If I could keep absolutely still until the terror left me, the danger would be past. Not to breathe audibly, not to rustle a leaf in the diary—to be as still as death—this was the point. The necessity took on a tragic importance, a feverishly exaggerated importance, for the thing had seized me suddenly, with no sort of warning, and at the one wrong time in the span of a life.

He did not open his eyes. He seemed to have altered.

He looked guilty. Something of immutability seemed to have been taken away from him. He was my father, and he had forged my chains. He had seen one of the great forces break his son, and by his fault. The Church used to relinquish offenders "to the secular arm." He had relinquished me to gravitation. His sin had sentenced me. He was the person I was to hate.

No, no, I could not hate. When I could breathe rightly again I knew that even a bitterly whimsical thought of hate never again could find a foothold in my mind. No hate for anything but hate, and that needs pity most of all. And if hate should be pitied, what of grief such as he must have felt? The Sign would have come slowly. There would have been times when he doubted, and perhaps would have prayed that his fear might prove to be groundless; then a time when he knew, when it was too plain any longer to be doubted. . . . He would have suffered like one crucified.

There would have been the time when it was brought home to him that he could not have a soldier son. The realization would have dragged him backward through the years to the hour of that lapse so trifling in itself, so momentous for him. Countless acrid memories would have leapt into his mind. He would have been galled by a relentless sense of guilt which must have seemed out of all proportion to his offense.

Human laws have been called cruel, but how much less cruel they are than the laws of nature! Man searches for the intent. Nature asks no such commiserating question before passing sentence. And so for all these years he had suffered as one beyond relieve. . . .

He was sleeping peacefully.

Perhaps he had learned to be reconciled, to give up certain desires, to forget the dissonance. He had seen me as an active boy who romped in his fetters. It would be an insult to me to assume that he was always

reminded. Surely if mother had been able only to tear out a leaf, I had erased for him some of the lines that once lacerated his memory. . . .

But he would return to it—as I did. There was no escaping that. It would be a silent matter, deep in the recesses of him, bitterer, perhaps, for the length of the liberty. It would be something he never really could put from him.

It was *his* burden that I carried on my back.

I read this in that austere, unconscious face. With the flash of the truth I felt a strange access of tranquillity . . . out of which arose something more.

I stood up, there in the still room in the presence of the man of all men. I drew myself up, up. I seemed to reach a height I never had reached before—to have lifted my head into higher currents, to be seeing farther, to be feeling the thrill of a new, more commanding angle of vision. I was as a traveler galled and halted under a burden, who, by the magic of a spring or a vision, suddenly catches up his load and strides forward with a glad heart.

### XIII

When I came again to the city at the beginning of another April to start my work in the great building that is to be a hospital, a new Terror was raging in Europe. Those were dark days.

“You must go,” said my father, with that gentle finality so characteristic of him. “You are needed. Colonel Thorling has asked you to do very important work. I shall be happy to know that you are doing it. You see that I am quite well now. As good as new.”

His hands rested upon my shoulders, and when I looked up into his face I saw the old spirit, but not the same body that once held the old spirit. Some day I shall have to go back and take up his work. It is written. It will be my duty when the call comes. I cannot

be sure that it will ever be to me what it has been to him. But what it has been to him will be a vital element of what it may be to me.

My mother said a handsome thing when I was going away.

"You know, Anson," she said, "a woman has slumpy moments in her early mother days when she asks herself why she has her children. Really, she does sometimes go the length of that. And sometimes the answer doesn't come very clearly. Then arrives the day, if she is a lucky woman, when she understands, when she gets hold of the Why of it—when she looks at them and says, 'Yes, God was quite right, as usual.' How do you suppose I should feel without Sarah and you?"

"It *would* be dreadful," I said, with my arms tightly about her. "I'm glad we acquired a good running start in that questioning era and before you had a chance to change your mind."

"I just have sense enough," she murmured, with her cheek against mine, "to know my rewards when I see them."

"No one *ever* called me a reward," I laughed.

"I'll call you anything I like," said my mother.

The city did not look grim, even if the bulletin-boards had their sententious dribblings of disaster. Yet the grimness is here. The will of the nation has expended itself in a thousand palpable and impalpable ways. Sometimes that determination is to be seen as so much splendor, as massed self-mastery, as radiantly polarized intent, as something that waves and sings. Again it is seen as a steel hand—the head must have its hand. It has, for example, sent Anna Jassard to prison. It has put Lawrence Pine into khaki.

Anna Jassard will not relent. She will not, like inferior offenders against the wish of the nation, mis-



understand either the cause or the occasion of her disaster. In her trial she was quite able to riddle the logic of the prosecutor. But the larger logic remained. Her voice was a danger. It was necessary only to show the reality of this danger, and her very eloquence accentuated evidence of the hazard. She is in a Western prison, working . . . and thinking; turning that wonderful wishing globe in which she sees reflected not the world, but the single soul; not a mass, knitted by long agonies of adjustment, but an individual, a microcosm arrogating the prerogatives of the infinite in the desire for utter self-expression.

As for Pine, he has written a poem, which he calls "Men," and which surely is the manliest thing he has produced—a poem with blood and fire in it, simple as a gun-stock, vibrant as a victorious cry. He wrote it in camp and sent a copy to Sarah. It should have every honor.

And so the arm of the mass reached out to one dreamer and put her into the dark; and it reached out to another dreamer and put him by force into the open with other men. It reached out for me, then put me aside. . . . It is ordained. We all are fragments of a common soul. The whole is greater than the part. We cannot share mass joys without sharing mass griefs, mass hazards, mass labor. Nature has decreed that the atom should be unthinkable. For our debt to the mass the mass must draw the bill. Anna Jassard refuses to pay. All prisons are debtors' prisons. . . .

The universe of thought is the true heaven of the individual soul. Here every individual can be a czar—a czar who need not be murdered, and whose tenure is eternal. . . .

By every contact I realize that the common expectation is of an earth transformed by this war.

In every such seizure humanity has cried out in the same voice. It has been sure that the world would

never again be the same. And it has been right. From each travail humanity has emerged with a fervent confidence that the agony would have transfigured life, have washed away all foulness and ferocity and somehow have wrenched from the brow of sorrow its thorny crown. I suppose that again and again the haggard eyes of hope have thought they actually saw the world as "made over," as utterly chastened and changed. And over and over again it has changed only a very little, leaving its hulking evils pretty much as they were, with the battles of peace to be fought in the interval, long or short, until another war should come. Perhaps the very last eruption of war will find humanity like the worlds that have ceased to vomit fire—incrusted by death. Perhaps conflict is indeed the bitter fundamental of life, ordained like the cyclone or the torrent, and the argument between sympathy and the sword is to go on forever.

But victory is not to be looked for in utter change. Victory will be not a dismemberment, but an illumination. We must be content if the lightning that inflicts the cruel wound has meanwhile lifted the darkness and shown to groping mankind through the murky way a momentary glimpse of the goal.

The goal? Alas! It may be that there is no goal upon which all eyes ever can be fixed. Eyes stare too many different ways. Too many eyes are blind. Too many eyes never watch the horizon. They are following the near pits and the near pleasures. The most we can expect from any glare that lights up the spaces of life is that those who will look shall see things *as they are!* My father uttered the cry—for Light!

Perhaps light enough would unify the desires of the world.

The new boy in the elevator cage, an under-the-draft-age boy, who did not know me and had to be informed

as to the floor, brought me to the appointed door in my city hive with a fresh sense of the formidable disarrangement of life.

I did not guess that romance awaited on the other side of that door.

Sarah should not have been there—Sarah in her nurse's garb. It was not her time for being away from the hospital.

And Rudley should not have been there. He should have been sitting up feebly somewhere in France.

But it was Rudley, Rudley leaping to his feet from that seat beside Sarah.

Rudley—but not the Rudley who went away over a year ago. That bronzed face was different . . . the smile was different; as if the lips were of a less resilient element; as if he had smiled often when there was nothing joyous before him or within him. And his eyes were older eyes. They had the used look; they had gathered into a focus—well, a great war, the earth and the sky of it, the blue and the red of it, all that throbs through the warp and woof of sight and sound. There was a scar on his left temple, running into his hair, as if to hide most of its story there. Another matter I could not place at first, even when he dashed forward with that fine handclasp. Whatever it was, it seemed to mark him throughout—as a kind of blight, and I winced in the thought that he was stricken beyond anything to be indicated or estimated.

At last I realized that his left arm was quite limp. When the sense of this came, the dangling limb became so obvious, so markedly pathetic, that I was as chagrined as if my blindness had been an offense against his infirmity.

He had found both Laura and Sarah, and had exercised his own resourceful expedients for acquiring Sarah, who had the look of a girl who has been quite pleasantly kidnapped. It became absorbingly clear to me that I

had waited all my life to see Sarah look the way she looked at that moment.

And as to this bronzed boy, surely the extraordinary fascination which always had lurked in all scrutiny and in all my thought of him, in every early emotion of doubt or admiration, were all prophetic, had I been able to understand, of this fulfilment.

Yet there was a sad sub-harmony in the music of this moment. Not by the cripplement of Rudley; not by that suddenly transmitted sense of the detachment of Sarah. Both of these factors might well have had their inevitable note. There was something else, something that was, I have no doubt, whispering from those deeply fastened selfish fibers of me . . . something that wished. I suppose that we are tricked into hearing such a whisper as much by the spectacle of happiness as by the spectacle of despair. It wriggles its way through into our consciousness, though it be but for a fraction of a moment, before the part of us that rules can summarily order it down . . . the Me that compares, and that mutters, "And you. . . !" Is it this Me that has mocked my theory of a thought-heaven? Is the mockery of trying to think without the mass eternally paralleled by the mockery of trying to think without the Other One?

"You see," exclaimed Sarah, "we won the toss!"

"Good work!" I cried, jubilantly. "But which toss do you mean?"

"The sky one," declared Sarah, "of course."

She shone like a delighted Madonna.

"There's only one winning worth talking about," said Rudley, fervently, with his good arm gripping Sarah's shoulders. "And I won't be interrupted."

It was hard to drag from him anything like a satisfying story of his adventures. His part in that last fight I shall have to get from some one else. He did not make light of anything; nor did his evasions seem like a mere reticence. It is the way with men who have

done things, when they are too young to be going backward. Rudley is still going forward. He is invalided home, but he has his plans. His work as an instructor has already begun, or is about to begin. The paralysis of the arm is not to be permanent. He has this quite arranged; there are doctors to quote for his theory, particularly that sulky doctor from Marseilles who performed the third operation, and who, if there is one man on the top of the earth who knows what he is talking about, is that one man.

"Zorn will be glad to see you!" I burst out in the midst of our give and take.

"I've seen him." Rudley's face darkened. "There is something wrong with him. He is very weak. He wouldn't believe there was anything he couldn't do. 'It is the young man's hour,' he complained. He had been speaking of your father. 'Nonsense,' I said to him. 'Joffre and Foch aren't young men. Haig and Pershing aren't kids. You're as young as Wilson and Roosevelt.' But he shook his head. They've brought him down."

"Well, you ought to know," my aunt struck in, "that this doesn't mean he won't be up again."

But Rudley was not to be shaken. "If you saw him . . ."

I knew what he meant when I beheld Zorn on the following day, propped in his funny bed, with a stamp-album on his knees.

"I see you have been reading," I said, knowing well what the book was.

"A history of the world," he returned, dryly.

The strange room had an order, though there was litter near the bed. It appears that the German woman from the basement has been performing the necessary offices. Zorn would not hear of any other care save the daily visit of a Jewish doctor he has known for many years.

"Poor Schmidt is a fool in a good many ways," declared Zorn. "But he knows more than most of them. He is a real scientist."

"What does he say?" I asked, bluntly.

"He says I am quite likely to die. That is one of the ways in which he is a fool. He knows only about bodies. I am more than a body."

I could imagine the kind of dialogue that would have jostled such an opinion from Schmidt, and the verbal reaction that opinion was certain to have elicited. Having communicated so much, Zorn made me to know that farther approach to this subject was inexpedient. He wanted to talk of Robert and Laura, which he did with an awakening vehemence that left him very weak. He pushed the stamp-album away and permitted me to carry it to its place in an oak rack near at hand. I kept him silent for a time while I told him of my father and his new cheer; of the work I had done and the work I was about to begin, and of every promising activity of which I had heard.

He asked me about the Book, and astonished me by remaining silent while I told him of the pause in its career. He was content to look at me with a measuring intentness, as if making a profound calculation. There was an instant when I thought he was about to express something that had kindled in him. But weakness or a changed angle of thought left him mute.

When I went away it was after a pledge that we should have a talk on some evening very soon.

#### XIV

How shall I write of the miracle? How shall I describe the indescribable? How shall I give to an event that was terrific, and at the same time supremely lovely, the word that may escape a disfiguring color? There are blazing wonders that drop into the heart like a

meteor, and that like a sidereal spark seem to have traversed infinity before plunging through the insignificant shell of ourselves. We may putter over the concrete sign, but the splendor of the portent fills us with a feebly articulate awe.

Perhaps my blessed miracle would have seemed not less of perfect beauty with any background and at any hour. But that glad shout of the changed tide in Europe had swept across the water, and every American heart was beating a little faster when I encountered the private miracle and saw sky and earth, and the whole phantasmagoria of life, as newly and majestically miraculous.

That day began unlike other days, first in being a day with a sort of nervous brightness. I shall remember it as having a glint of strangeness in it. The morning newspaper was electrical. There was stupendous news that presaged the real opening of the victory chapter. I went into the street in an exultant daze, starting downtown toward the old workshop and plunging absently in that direction until some automatic reminder from the brain cells that attend to such things turned me to the quite different way in which I should have gone. There were strange figures in the streets, foreign-looking uniforms, archaic costumes—peasant girls in clusters, and wearing bright scarlets and greens, at one point made passage difficult. I looked up. An amazing image was framed against a notch in the sky-line. At first I saw a scaffold, clear and ugly, with a rope dangling. . . . The rope ran in an unmitigated line to the shoulders of a man. The noose was about the man's neck . . . and he was smoking a cigarette.

There was to be a great parade, a parade visualizing the democracies of the world, the martyrdoms and triumphs of popular progress. This was quite to be believed once a spectator took occasion to glance into any of the streets crossing Fifth Avenue. Yet it fell

to me to reach a first consciousness of the man in the noose.

My eyes went back to him. He did not look like a martyr. He did not look historic or heroic. He had the face of a portrait on a medicine-bottle. A beatific comfortableness surrounded the pivotal cigarette.

Suddenly there was a signal or the rumor of a signal, and the man threw away the cigarette and stood up in the float, ready to be hung. . . . And beyond him I saw a tall, somber man, wearing a gabardine, practising a gesture of invocation or supplication; and a flaxen-haired girl, robed as Liberty, and chewing gum, lifted her white arm to point aspiringly.

I think it may have been the man in the gabardine who made me think of Zorn. At all events, Zorn hovered in my thoughts for the length of the day, a day whose duties ignored the parade, yet one continually punctuated by the pulsing red notes of distant bands.

My anxieties as to that stricken friend had been deepened by successive visits, though on the occasion of my last call, a week before, he had seemed stronger again. As the afternoon wore on I grew resentful of waiting until night, as I had planned, for a visit to that gray street. The space of absence began to appear as having been shamefully long. I caught up my hat at last and hurried off.

Zorn's house looked as gray as the street, though I entered it then, as always, with a sense of an inextinguishable light within.

I encountered a woman at the foot of the stairs. She had a baby and a bundle. With both she seemed to be hesitating before the stairs. The bundle was formless and intricate. It did not look to be heavy, but threatened complications if it were not carried properly.

"Suppose you let me carry the baby," I suggested.

She stared at me in a startled way. Meanwhile I took the baby. It had a delightfully soft, warm feeling.



I fancy it was a very new baby. And I led the way up-stairs.

I was quite near the top of the first flight, much concentrated in my burden, and for that reason in no situation to consider any other presence, when I became conscious of a pair of small shoes . . . and of a pair of miraculous ankles arising from those shoes; then of the frock of a hospital nurse.

She stood at the top step and she was smiling.

When I saw that it was Laura Rudley I still had to consider my obligation, so that it may be that I was somewhat brief in greeting. As it turned out, this was the baby's floor. Since the mother had to unlock a door, I took occasion to stand by, and in the end to relinquish the child rather clumsily. I believe that giving back a baby is much more difficult than taking hold of it. Anyway, the mother said she was much obliged, and I went out to the landing, knowing that Laura would be waiting.

"Go right up," she said. "I'm after that janitress woman."

She saw the question in my eyes.

"I've seen him twice within a week. He needs better care than he is getting—at least *more* care. He seems willing to have me come once in a while. It can't be more than that for me. I had the day free for the parade."

"Then you marched to-day?"

She nodded and ran lightly down the stairs. This meant that Sarah also had marched in that patriotic pageant. And after that long wait and long march Laura was here, scuttling up and down stairs in the service of a tired old man.

A growl answered my knock at Zorn's door. When he saw me there was an interval in which he peered at me in such an odd way that I was in doubt whether he resented or rejoiced. Then I discovered that a specific query was working itself out in him.

"Did you know that Laura Rudley was here?"

"No," I answered. "I met her on the stair."

This appeared to produce no effect whatever. He waved his hand toward a chair at the foot of the bed.

"It is plucky of her," I added, "after that long march."

"Plucky is a poor word for it," he said, firmly. "There should be something finer."

The remark was characteristic, but the manner of it was subdued. He appeared, indeed, terribly worn. His mouth had the lines of suffering. His eyes were less piercing. I wished that I might have been able to tell him that he looked better. Instead I felt the shock of a fresh anxiety for him.

"It is pitiful," he said, presently, "to be a burden."

"You didn't think of burdens when you were lifting them yourself."

"But I did!" he exclaimed, with a reviving vehemence. "I did think of them. They were often a prodigious annoyance. Over and over again I have thought of sick people as an abominable nuisance. I—"

He paused as Laura came in, and followed her with his eyes as she carried something to a corner table and stood for a space adjusting the articles spread there.

"You must be very good to my patient," said Laura, moving toward the bed. She paused with a bright glance at Zorn.

"Is he very difficult?" I asked.

"Awfully."

"Won't obey?"

"Only under positive threats."

"Don't be severe with him," I said, echoing the tone of her admonition. "I've known him for a long time, and really—"

Zorn grunted. "The young—the rich—to have life to spend—to have the golden hours of youth to scatter,

royally, stupendously! Then to be old—to have spent all—”

“But you are not old,” I protested.

He raised a hand quickly.

“All the worse, then, to be bankrupt of life!”

Laura moved away, as if perhaps to reduce the incitement of an audience.

“You are young,” Zorn continued, “and you are a kind of philosopher. Having your philosophy and your youth, you should be able to do something with both of them. The trouble is . . . Take the case of your book, *The Great Desire*. What is the great desire? I’ve no doubt you have it all glibly arranged. The desire for money—for power—a tragedy; ghastly, a ravening mockery. The desire for fame—a treadmill horror at its worst, at its best a kind of tenancy in the incurable ward—struttings under an imaginary crown, foolish ingrowing illusions, the supreme vanity, the supreme bitterness. The desire for knowledge—an endless journey, full of sparkling lures, littered with promises, but endless, and because it is endless stalked by disappointment. The desire for self-expression—I remember your quotation of Anna Jassard—the elemental desire that is not a desire at all, but an instinct that is not to be singled out for sanctification because worms have it. The desire for love—”

He halted for an instant, breathing deeply, and making a slight movement of his head as if he had checked himself in the act of turning toward Laura, who sat across the room against the shadow that lay beyond a window.

“—the desire for love—the most glittering of all desires, sometimes traduced to an animal greed, sometimes merely the delusion magnificent, sometimes . . . sometimes almost the perfect wish.”

He raised himself painfully in a growing eagerness to pierce me with the thought that was giving that feverish light to his eyes.

"Let me tell you something. There is one desire that has held men and goaded men from the beginning. It is flaming in the soul of Europe at this minute. It bursts from lips and from printed pages. You will be told that it has been born of the war. But it was born with mankind. In every crimsoned gully of France, in every hell hole of Russia, or Macedonia, it cries as it did on the rock of Rimmon, in the wilderness of Paran, on the deck of Hasis-Adra's boat, in the bloody chariots of Sisera. It rang bitterly from the lips of the Man on the Cross.

"It is the desire to find God."

He glared while he spoke as if I were contradicting.

"It doesn't matter that you or any other calculating philosopher should be blind to the sign. It is older than all the claptrap of history—older than blasphemy. You can read it in the hysteria of infidels, screaming as women scream in the denial of their own wish. You can read it in the worship of Agni as readily as in the scientific sneer about a 'divine syndicate.' The manape strutting in the primeval forest didn't know what ailed him. The educated ape in the laboratory often is quite as blind to his own hunger.

"I tell you, son, when you have apprehended this cry of the soul you will understand the smile of the martyrs. You will be able to read the riddle of your Anarchist woman. You will know why it was after the Marne that the Blond Beast began prating about God. You will know why science, though it thinks it has found savages without Deity, has found none without ghosts. and that when gods are set up by the Goths, and by the Hindus, and by the Polynesians, they are the same lot because the same terrors and the same desires run in all the blood of the earth."

He sank back, and we who had listened sought to quiet him by our silence. When he spoke again it was with a changed tone and with face upturned.

"Do you know, I looked for God in the Church. I preached what they call the Gospel. Perhaps there was some gospel in what I preached. I don't know. But I didn't find God. No fault of the Church, it may be. I went out into the world to find God. I've been looking. I might have found Him if I had been poor enough. . . . It is too bad. . . . I can see it now . . . too bad that I should have received that money . . . out of a grave. And it is too bad that—that I should—"

He turned his face toward me, then raised himself once more.

"—that I should have tried to find God *alone*."

His voice or his look, or both, might have prepared me to find that he had not yet said the uttermost that was in his mind.

"I should not speak of myself. I am of the past . . . except that I have seen, and may point out. . . . Observe that to the very last I am fooling myself with the hope that things *may* be pointed out! It is astounding! We wait too long—lag and call it patience. Patience! It is the wolf under our tunic. It was being patient too long that gave the world this war. Nature is never patient. She says it—she *does* it! Give your great desire a voice—and a fist! I don't know what your desire is, but I am sure . . . I am sure . . ."

His voice wavered, but his eyes pierced me steadily.

"Admit nothing as an obstacle. There are no obstacles save those we create . . . not one. Be defiant—and gentle. Be masterful—nobly. Don't hug your life—fling it. I know you won't fling it downward. I can see you going on . . . if you will not be *humble* . . . if you will *demand*, if you will believe that everything is yours . . . everything!"

There was a moment's pause before he added:

"You should marry!"

This came from him as though he spoke out of a trance, yet the saying of it lighted him, drew every ex-

pressive line in his singular face to a sharp edge of meaning, until I felt myself to be fixed, besieged by the intensity, the unescapable challenge, of the phenomenon. I could not hold him to account. He was to be humored. I must be adroitly submissive. I saw Laura sitting quite still. Her gentle quiet reinforced me. This was not a feverish form of banter. Zorn was speaking out of some immensely traversed vision that had affected him to the depths, out of an impulse, yet with the clearness of a diagrammed conclusion. To soften the impact of our minds, to move with him, to answer him in kind—this was my duty as I saw it in that turgid moment.

"Every man should marry," I stammered, "who—"

"This is not an argument," he cried, lifting himself still further in the bed, until I saw Laura, from her chair, mechanically put out a protesting hand. "Not a discussion. No, no! I am speaking to you. . . ." He paused for a moment without mitigating the steadiness of his gaze at my rapt face. "I am speaking to you by the right of one who has been given to see. Understand me? One who has been given to see, and who can brush aside . . . everything, everything that is in the way . . . every absurd obstacle, every phantasmal deterrent to the great thing. . . . You should marry—"

His face underwent a singular contortion, an exaggerated grimace it seemed at the moment, as by an effort or a seizure, and he leveled a thin, quavering, but thrillingly vehement finger across the bed.

"You should marry—and *there is the woman* you should marry!"

Before I felt myself enshrouded in a kind of white darkness I caught a glimpse of Laura's eyes and of a movement in her lips. I could read nothing. I groped desperately, as I might if pushed into a vast, opaque silence with a command to choose a way at once. A sense of outrage—not as to myself, but as to that girl

sitting there, her hands on her knees, helpless by the grotesqueness of an impossible situation. Yet he was Zorn, and I couldn't know that he was not very shortly to die. He was not to be held to account. After all, no insight or theory influenced the thing I did say. . . . No, it came out, it returned to him in that strange rebound which even he might not have been able to explain.

"I will if she'll ask me."

I winced at the sound of it, as if I had done some absolutely shameless, some irretrievably catastrophic thing—perhaps the very thing the sight of him and the thought of Laura gave me the wish not to do. But it was out into the solemn hush of that room.

I saw Laura stand, and it seemed to me that when she did so she arose out of all that I ever had heaped about her, that I saw her suddenly as she was, with everything that I had thought of as beautiful in her accentuated a thousandfold; and that all I ever had felt and had denied to myself again and again reached out as suddenly toward her slender, illuminated loveliness.

She walked straight toward me with a tremulous smile on her lips, a smile so faint that only the exaltation of those throbbing seconds could have made it possible for me to see it . . . and dropped to her knees before me.

"She asks you, Anson Grayl."

I suppose it was a sob that sent me dumb, that in the thunderous silence after she had spoken made it utterly inconceivable that I should move a muscle, that drew every emotion of that moment into a single paroxysm. It did not matter that with either her word or her extraordinary gesture went a thought of the man in the bed. It did not matter whether she had measured or remembered or forgotten anything at all. She was there before me, Laura Rudley, the rebel, the hater of lies, the girl with the dream of a world made honest, a humanity made clean . . . asking me to marry her.

They were my hands that went out. They were my fingers that touched her hair and that drew her face to meet mine, though I seemed to be watching through a mist. When I knew the living wonder of her nearness, with nothing held back, in an attitude that glorified her and that seemed to shed an ineffable brightness upon the scene—when my lips touched hers the world that I had known melted away. The universe dissolved into an exquisite instant that was fire and music and the color of heaven. And like a bell-note out of infinity came the voice from the pillow:

“Thank God!”

I sprang up, drawing Laura with me—rather roughly, I have thought since (though she says she remembers no such matter)—and turned to Zorn (holding fast to Laura)—

“What have you done, Mr. Magician?” I cried out. “What have you done? Is this true? I can’t believe it. I—”

Laura’s fingers closed over mine.

I saw Zorn, his lips working, and glistening lines in the hollow of his cheeks. Yet I never had seen in him a more completely answered look. It was as if he saw the dawn of a real tranquillity.

He lifted a hand, slowly, and with something that fluttered between admonition and benediction.

“The way to God is through love.”

I am still incredulous. In certain moments I am appalled. Such a happening is stupendous . . . like the War.

One cannot reason about such a thing.

No. It is bewildering. In a way, accusatory . . . as if I must somehow justify it. I feel guilty. Deliciously guilty.

I wander as in a vast, sweet cloud, in which I hear voices. . . . Sarah, with that laugh, saying that she will feel dreadfully the loss of my restraining influence.



My mother (in a queer letter) declaring that she never should have let me go away to write a book.

Rudley, manlike, simply remarking, "How did you do it?"

Aunt Paul, looking particularly rotund as she says it, but never in my long experience of her—not even when she was carrying the banner—looking so impressively *interested*, muttering: "And I picked you for the historian of the Successfully Single! Traitor!"

And Laura, insisting that it is true.

Ah yes! I have wanted to discover, to visualize, somehow to appraise that sense of destination without which it is so difficult to fancy a sense of Deity. Perhaps, after all, something of that secret is to be read in joy of the road.

The fact of Laura, for example, sheds upon the road a light pure and beautiful, a light in which I seem to find a prophecy that beyond the illusion of horizon will shine at last the true meaning of the immediate way. I can understand better than ever before how an intense foreground light might, indeed, obscure our sense of the beyond. The happy do not diagram immortality.

So that if, at this moment, Life were to ask me, "Whither are you going?" I should be obliged to answer, "I am not sure, but I am going with Laura."

Yet the way stretches onward . . . onward. There is to be the puzzle we call Peace, the Great Awakening we call After. And the world will wish. There will be red quarrels, questions screamed out of dark places, prosperity gorging itself with comical gluttony, poverty cursing the system, mothers pointing into the pit of sacrifice, festivals of glorification, maimed men at workbenches. There will remain hungry children in stupid schools, bewildered preachers, politicians wandering in circles, "practical" men spitting on art, painted women coddling dogs, torture-places stuffed with creatures who

have offended, grown men and women who cannot read, but who can think, groping . . . groping, and listening . . . and wishing.

One could wish to forget all this.

One could wish—

*"I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come."*

Yet one has his own wishes . . . his very own.

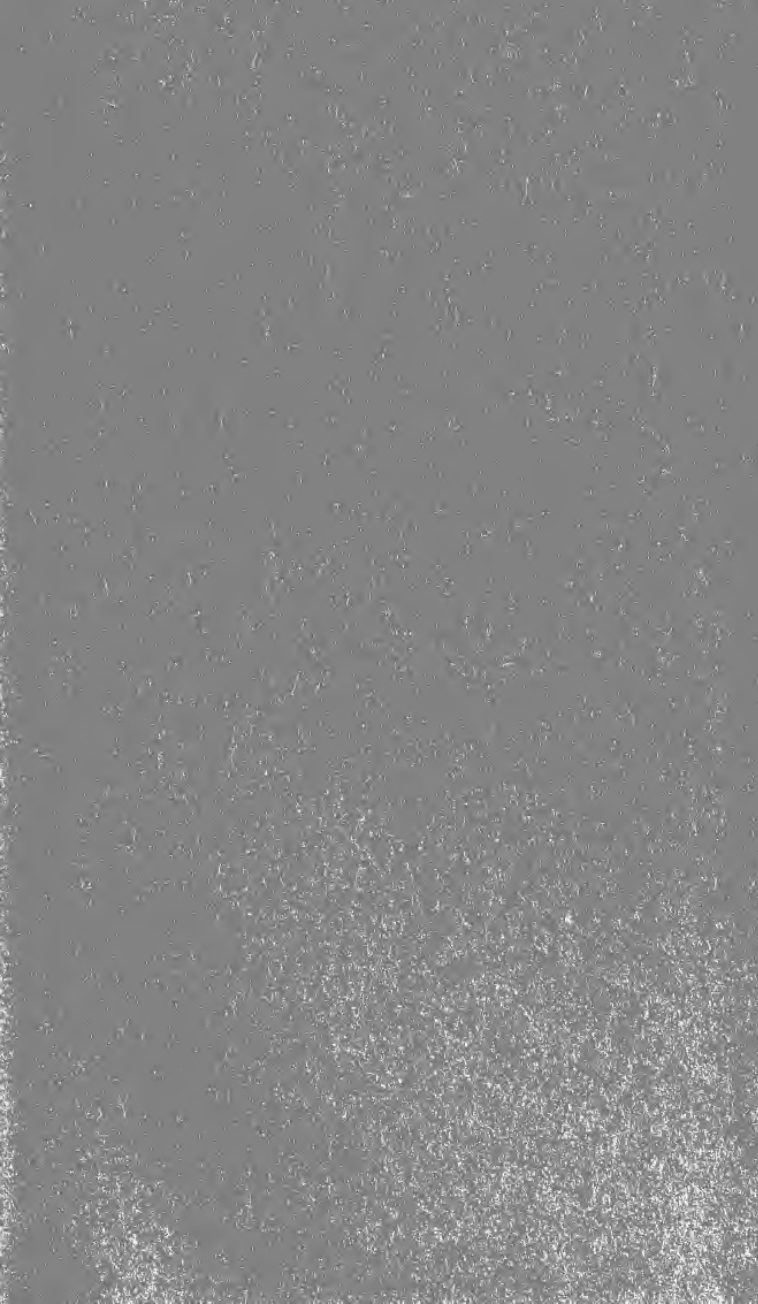
*"He shall give thee the desires of thine heart."*

Life holds wide the Gate. Beyond is a dazzling confusion. And I am going with Laura.

THE END







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